

FOSTERING AN ATMOSPHERE OF YOUTH MINISTRY

A THESIS-PROJECT

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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To my wife, Hannah.

I would not have been able to do this without you. Through the joys and the discouragements,  
you've never given up. I love you and I like you.

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## PREFACE

The idea for this project came from a conversation with a fellow pastor serving in a rural congregation in Minnesota. His passion and vision for his congregation's ministry to adolescents were being overwhelmed by lack. With no discernable adult leader, dwindling attendance from younger families, inconsistent involvement from parents, and limited finances from the congregation, his vision seemed to be stuck in "brainstorm mode." However, what if there were a way for this pastor to guide his church through these perceived setbacks? What if youth ministry in his context looked different from the church down the street? What if his congregation expanded its view of youth ministry so that it became as natural as breathing? In other words, how might a rural congregation seek to strengthen its youth ministry?

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis project seeks to address unique complications that accompany a youth ministry within rural congregations. Churches in this ministry context may not have access to the same amount of resources as their larger counterparts, but this does not mean that they do not have a youth ministry or that they are less successful in discipling adolescents. Through the study of biblical principles and examining ministry structures and praxes, rural congregations may better develop an effective, healthy youth ministry.



## CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

The central question of this thesis project is “How might a rural congregation seek to strengthen its youth ministry?” Rural congregations are faced with a unique set of challenges in their ministry to adolescents which larger churches in more populated areas may never encounter. These potential challenges include not having a paid youth worker/pastor, a limited or even non-existent flow of income/resources directed specifically to the youth ministry, an unimpressive or non-existent student meeting space, or perhaps no regularly scheduled youth ministry opportunities at all. Any combination of these challenges may result in discouragement and even ministerial fatigue within a rural congregation.

Before progressing further, it is worth defining a rural setting. The Health Resources and Service Administration states that while the U.S. Census Bureau does not formally define “rural,” it does define an “urbanized area” as having a population of over 50,000. “Urban clusters” must have populations of at least 2,500 and no more than 50,000. The lack of definition regarding any population under 2,500 suggests that this qualifies as a rural setting.<sup>1</sup> This thesis project will utilize these definitions of an urbanized area, an urban cluster, and a rural setting.

When the pace of youth ministry seems to be set by congregations with a large staff, a long list of programs/outings/service projects, a state-of-the-art

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1. Christine Alfano, “Defining Rural Population,” Health Resources & Services Administration, <https://www.hrsa.gov/rural-health/about-us/definition/index.html> (last modified December 19, 2018).

facility, and a seemingly limitless budget, how can rural congregations possibly keep up? Logically, a rural congregation may reach two negative conclusions regarding their situation. The first conclusion is that their congregation's youth ministry must not be as "good" or "successful" since their larger counterparts do not seem to have any trouble hiring staff or utilizing their abundant resources. They conclude that in order to have an effective youth ministry, they must somehow resolve the challenges mentioned above.

The second conclusion begins with an assumption: having a consistent supply of resources and staff is required in order to have any ministry geared towards adolescents. Therefore, a lack of resources must mean that a congregation must not have any discernable youth ministry. The result of this conclusion is that a congregation may overlook potential ministry opportunities with their adolescent members.

### **Objectives of this Project**

In light of these two conclusions, this thesis will seek to fulfill three main objectives. The first objective is to study the pillars of intergenerational ministry found in Scripture: discipleship, mentorship, and fellowship. The second is to examine different praxes of youth ministry while considering additional insight regarding the pillars from the first objective. The final objective is to measure the effects of increased awareness on intergenerational ministry in a rural congregational setting.

This thesis project will encourage rural congregations to develop an atmosphere of youth ministry within their ministry context. This means youth discipleship and intergenerational ministries should be pursued and incorporated into the identity of the congregation so that they become a natural part of church life.

### **Ministry Setting**

This thesis's ideas were tested in the three congregations that make up the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish, located in Otter Tail County in West Central Minnesota. These congregations are not satellite campuses of the same church but are three separate congregations who have networked and shared both opportunities and burdens in ministry since the late 1800s. These three churches have a few things in common: they are all located in an area which qualifies as a rural setting, the attendance during the weekly worship service remains relatively consistent (100 people or fewer), they abide by similar constitutions, and they function under congregational polity. A summary of each congregation will highlight their differences as well as provide insight regarding the parameters, methodology, and implementation of the research project.

The first of the three congregations is Kvam Free Lutheran Church.<sup>2</sup> This congregation is located outside of Ashby, Minnesota, with a population of 436 as of 2014.<sup>3</sup> The congregation celebrated its 150th anniversary in July 2018. While

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2. Pronounced "Kuh-wam"

3. "Ashby, Minnesota," City.Data.com, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Ashby-Minnesota.html> (accessed June 20, 2019).

there are a few younger families, most members who fill the pews on any given Sunday are empty-nesters (no children living at home).

The second congregation is Zion/Sarpsborg<sup>4</sup> Free Lutheran Church, located on the north end of Dalton, Minnesota. As of 2014, the city holds 253 people.<sup>5</sup> This congregation is a merging of two separate congregations in the late 20th century due to the untimely destruction of the Sarpsborg church building. Similar to Kvam, most members are older. There are a few younger families active within this congregation as well as many families with college-age students.

The third and final congregation in the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish is Tordenskjold<sup>6</sup> Free Lutheran Church, located to the south of Underwood, Minnesota. As of the 2014 census, 338 people live in Underwood.<sup>7</sup> In 2021, the congregation will celebrate its 150th anniversary. Younger families dominate the pews during the worship service—much to the delight of the older members. Many of the parents in these younger families have chosen to move back into the area to find work after completing their post-secondary education.

Three people are on staff at the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish, including two full-time pastors and a secretary who works quarter-time. The pastors include

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4. Pronounced “Sarps-burg”

5. “Dalton, Minnesota,” City.Data.com, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Dalton-Minnesota.html> (accessed June 20, 2019).

6. Pronounced “Tord-in-shold”

7. “Underwood, Minnesota,” City.Data.com, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Underwood-Minnesota.html> (accessed June 20, 2019).

a senior pastor and a pastor of youth and family ministries. The three churches work together to provide youth ministry. With the assistance and advice of the pastor of youth and family ministries, each congregation elects people to serve on an advisory leadership team for the youth ministry. While students in the youth ministry come from each of the three churches, the group operates as though it belongs to a single congregation. In working together, the parish's youth ministry can accomplish more than the congregations could separately.

The Dalton Free Lutheran Parish is well-qualified to be the subject of this thesis project. The parish is dedicated to youth ministry: in addition to having a reasonably well-established youth ministry with consistent programs/opportunities, the parish also has a full-time ordained pastor of youth and family ministries who oversees a team of youth advisors, including parents of adolescents and college-age students.

But the parish also faces challenges common to rural areas. First, two of the three churches do not have facilities where adolescents may formally meet, placing the responsibility for facilities solely on Zion/Sarpsborg. Second, the formal budget for youth ministry is currently \$300 a year per church. Considering these two challenges, in addition to its rural context, the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish serves as a representative setting for this thesis project.

## Challenges in Rural Ministry

### The Shift of Population

One of the more pronounced shifts in the modern world is urbanization, the gradual shift of people from rural settings to more densely populated areas. The United Nations' updated statement on urbanization in 2018 predicted that 68 percent of the world's population will live in urban areas by the year 2050. As of 2018, 82 percent of North Americans lived in urbanized areas.<sup>8</sup> The press release did not explain why people were moving away from rural settings.

In his book, *Emerging Adulthood*, Jeffrey Arnett suggests that the technology revolution greatly influences young adults to move to urban areas. He writes,

Because of the extraordinary advances in technology, machines became able to perform most of the manufacturing jobs that were once the main source of employment in developed countries . . . in the early twentieth century, most work entailed making things in factory-based manufacturing jobs. By the early twenty-first century, most work involved using information in service-based work such as business, finance, insurance, education, and health.<sup>9</sup>

This means that nearly 70 percent of high school graduates in rural communities leave to continue their post-secondary education in more substantial cities,<sup>10</sup> and, according to data provided by Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser, choose to remain

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8. "World Urbanization Prospects 2018," United Nations, <https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-PressRelease.pdf> (accessed June 20, 2019).

9. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), 3.

10. Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 4.

in urbanized areas. Ritchie and Roser indicate that populations tend to lean toward urbanization as they become wealthier. Additionally, they point out many benefits that come with living in urban centers, including easy access to electricity and other utilities as well as improved sanitation and drinking water. Finally, Ritchie and Roser echo Arnett's indication of a shift in employment as they share data collected by the World Bank, showing that 82 percent of the population of the United States lived in urban centers, and only 1.66 percent of the population were farmers.<sup>11</sup> While there are undeniably occupations besides farming in rural areas, the data affirms a problematic reality for rural congregations: there are not as many people in their communities as there used to be.

### Budgets and Resources

This thesis does not assume that success in a congregation's youth ministry is solely dependent on the resources available to that ministry. That being said, it is worth taking a brief look at the ministry budgets of rural congregations. In a recent study of over 4,200 senior pastors, the National Association of Evangelicals discovered some enlightening statistics:

- 82 percent of pastors identified their community as a rural area or small town/city.
- Nearly 80 percent of pastors serve in congregations with fewer than 200 people, and 55 percent have fewer than 100 people in their church.
- The median annual budget of churches surveyed was \$125,000.
- 50 percent of pastors receive compensation under \$50,000 per year.<sup>12</sup>

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11. Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser, "Urbanization," Our World in Data, <https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization> (last modified June 13, 2018).

12. Brian Kluth, "Small Town, Small Church, Small Salary," National Association of Evangelicals, <https://www.nae.net/small-town-small-church-small-salary/> (last modified October 17, 2017).

While this study does not look into youth ministry budgets, the majority of surveyed pastors serving in small churches have budgets that barely register in the six-digit territory.

Many factors may cause a church to struggle with limited resources, including a drop in attendance and a lack of offerings. A study from the Barna Group looked into how the economic downturn affected churches in 2010. They found that churches reduced their spending (including freezing certain budgetary lines, looking for better deals, and monitoring their spending more carefully), cut staff and missionary support, and delayed non-vital facility improvements/renovations.<sup>13</sup> There is little to suggest that churches would not act in a similar fashion if faced with similar circumstances. These frugal considerations are a natural part of life for many rural congregations, regardless of the economy's condition. Limited money in a church's annual budget means even less money will be appropriated toward a youth ministry.

### **Methodology of the Project**

Considering the rural setting of this thesis project, a methodology was developed to answer the central question: "How might a rural congregation seek to strengthen its youth ministry?" This question breaks down into three separate questions. The first question is "How might a three-point parish assess the current health of its youth ministry?" The second question is "What steps should Dalton

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13. Barna Group, "The Economy's Impact on Churches (Part 2 of 3): How Churches Have Adapted," <https://www.barna.com/research/the-economys-impact-on-churches-part-2-of-3-how-churches-have-adapted/> (last modified January 25, 2010).



Free Lutheran Parish take to either begin or continue to pursue health within its youth ministry?” Finally, “Is there a way to measure the effectiveness of the steps taken in the second question?”

In order to answer the first and third questions, an initial questionnaire was developed and distributed to establish a baseline regarding the health of the youth ministry in the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish. The questionnaire is brief and precise, covering a variety of topics concerning youth and family/intergenerational ministries within the parish. These topics include leadership opportunities for adolescents within the parish; the level of priority given to ministry opportunities for youth and families; congregants’ sensitivity and awareness concerning the demographics of the surrounding population, fellowship, and community; and the utilization of technology during the worship service. Participants were asked to answer the questionnaire in reference to their specific congregation unless otherwise directed. There were some questions which were repeated to broaden their response to the parish level.

Rather than randomly selecting participants from the parish, the target audience for the questionnaire was members of the church councils from November 2018–November 2019.<sup>14</sup> Council members are formally elected by the congregation and represent their church in both administrative matters and areas of spiritual concern/welfare. These positions include deacons, trustees, a congregational treasurer, and a secretary. A physical copy of the questionnaire

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14. This is the timeframe between annual congregational meetings when new council members are elected.

was given to the council members to serve as a tangible reminder to complete the questionnaire.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, there was a risk of people not participating due to a lack of consistent internet access and technological literacy. To further encourage participation, the anonymity of each council member was guaranteed, and a number was assigned to each response. A master key was filed on a document and saved in a password-protected computer. The document was stored in an external hard drive in the instance that the document on the computer was inaccessible. The questionnaire responses were kept in a fire-proof safe within the offices of the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish.

The duration of this project was three months. At the end of three months, an identical questionnaire was given to the council members to measure the effectiveness of the project. The project ran from February 1 to April 30, 2019. These dates were intentionally selected to better intersect with a busier time of year in the parish's youth ministry as well as to better gauge the effectiveness of the steps taken between the questionnaires over a more substantial period. The timeline of the project could have been longer, but not without running into a shift in schedules for most council members due to the change in seasons.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, some of the members would reach the end of their service term at the end of autumn.

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15. This request was made by more than one council member.

16. Many of the council members are farmers or construction contractors.

In order to address the second question,<sup>17</sup> the youth minister took three significant steps which directly involved or affected the parish's youth ministry. The first step was the implementation of training workshops, intended to address specific cultural topics, trends, and themes. While the church council members were strongly encouraged to attend, the workshops were open to the public and were held at Zion/Sarpsborg<sup>18</sup> in Dalton. An informal survey was handed out in the bulletins for two weeks, allowing members of the congregations to fill in short answer questions which indicated areas of youth culture they would like to learn more about and areas that caused them concern. Based on their responses, five major themes emerged and became the subjects for the Culture Workshops. In chronological order, these topics included technology/social media, hurt/the world beneath,<sup>19</sup> focus/lifestyle trends, religion and spirituality, and the sexual revolution/cohabitation. The Culture Workshops were designed primarily for parents and adults. The intention was to not only give them information regarding each topic but also to allow them a chance to share and discuss their observations and to receive instruction on where to find additional material/resources on each topic.

The second step was to encourage intentional intergenerational relationships among congregation members. During an average Sunday worship

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17. "What steps might be taken by the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish to either begin or continue to pursue health within their youth ministry?"

18. Zion/Sarpsborg was selected because of its larger facilities.

19. Taken from Chap Clark's book, *Hurt 2.0* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

service, each church within the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish usually has 100 people or fewer in attendance. Due to the number in attendance, there were several intergenerational relationships already established, ranging from people knowing each other's names to knowing a few interests or hobbies. There were two main objectives behind this part of the project: the first objective was to help encourage adults to connect with younger members more intentionally than had been done in the past. The second objective was to encourage these relationships to take place between non-family members.

The final step was to establish a team of student leaders who worked with the adult youth ministry advisory team. An additional layer of leadership was established, allowing students an opportunity to represent their peers in the discussion and scheduling of future ministry opportunities including outings, retreats, camps, fundraisers, and service projects. Additionally, this team allowed students to practice and develop leadership skills in a relatively safe and controlled environment. Potential members of this leadership team were recommended by adult advisors from the three congregations in the parish and approached with an invitation to serve in this capacity.

The goal for this team of student leaders was to meet twice during the project. Initially, the students would meet to be briefed regarding the capacity in which they would serve, and they would be given the task of brainstorming options for a possible student missions trip to Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the summer of 2020. They would meet a second time along with the adult youth advisor team to inform them of the results of their discussion.

Due to the length of time dedicated to this research project, it was necessary to make some changes to the end of the second questionnaire to prevent participants from forgetting how they responded in the first questionnaire. In other words, how could legitimate growth or decay in the parish's youth ministry be measured while removing the possibility of "false movement" due to faulty memory? To that end, open-ended questions were placed at the end of the second questionnaire which helped clarify where participants believed there was strengthening, what areas needed improvement, how they were personally challenged during the project, and how they believed the parish's youth and family ministry might grow in the future.

### **Assumptions**

#### **A Desire to Focus on More Than Entertainment**

There is an abundance of activities, programs, and events to engage adolescents in a ministry context. Games and outings are fun, but a youth ministry which exists solely to entertain adolescents is not only not feasible for rural congregations but may cause the congregation to forsake its God-given mission to "make disciples of all nations." Failure to make disciples in order to entertain students causes a local congregation to be no different from the local Parks and Recreation Department offering fun opportunities with no intention to delve into a life of faith. In the words of Duffy Robbins,

The number one goal of youth ministry is not tithing, church membership, voter registration, political mobilization, retreat attendance, recruiting students to invite their friends, denominational involvement, tattoo avoidance, sin management, or sales of t-shirts/light

bulbs/candy/spaghetti/cookies/Christmas cards/glow-in-the-dark posters of the pastor. It is helping students develop a love relationship with God . . . Our mandate as youth workers—whether paid or volunteer . . . is to help students love God and develop a relationship of growing, deepening intimacy with God through His Son, Jesus.<sup>20</sup>

While students engage and have fun together in a youth ministry setting, it cannot be at the cost of forsaking the gospel. This attitude is assumed to be held by the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish.

### Intergenerational Care and Concern

The Dalton Free Lutheran Parish's care and concern for younger generations is evident in their commitment to have a full-time staff position which oversees youth and family ministries and in the long-term existence of their youth ministry. I assume that the older generations have a vested interest in the overall well-being of younger generations, especially concerning their spiritual development. But despite their best intentions, older members may be somewhat uninformed or misguided in their attempts to engage younger generations in the everyday life of the church. While they do not lack passion or interest, they may lack ministry innovation in the culture of the 21st century.

Regarding ministry innovation, Terry Dorsett writes,

Small churches must not abandon the next generation to an eternity in hell because the church cannot afford a Starbucks in the lobby or a laser light machine in the sanctuary. Small churches must find a way to reach emerging generations. Small churches will have to learn new approaches without discarding their core values or theological distinctives.<sup>21</sup>

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20. Duffy Robbins, *Building a Youth Ministry That Builds Disciples: A Small Book about a Big Idea* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 68.

21. Terry Dorsett, *Mission Possible: Reaching the Next Generation through the Small Church* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2012), 4.

The fear of failure must not keep small congregations from attempting to engage younger generations. This may require flexibility in changing existing ministries or developing entirely new ministry opportunities to best engage the modern-day youth culture.

### Desire to Continue Growing

This final assumption is dependent on the overall effectiveness of this thesis project. If the Culture Workshops, intentional focus on intergenerational relationships, and the existence of a Student Leadership Team are found to be valuable or useful by the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish, it stands to reason that a desire to continue these steps will be vocalized. What this looks like will depend on the results of this project and what the parish may determine as worthy of further pursuit. For example, the parish leadership may determine that some steps from this project are worth pursuing with changes to better fit the context. If, on the other hand, these steps are proven effective, they would continue with little to no change. This is reflective of the desire within the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish to see their youth ministry continue to grow and be established with each passing generation. At its root, this comes from a desire to see new generations of students come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior, as well as seeing them be challenged to grow in their relationship with Him.

## CHAPTER 2: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Bible does not contain the words “youth ministry.” It is absent in both Greek and Hebrew texts. The step-by-step guide for leading mission trips for high schoolers is not included in either the Old or New Testament. Jesus’ instructions to His disciples regarding junior high lock-ins are also non-existent (although He gets close when He mentions weeping and gnashing of teeth!). The Bible may not directly mention youth ministry, but it is saturated with theological principles and practices that drive the church, the body of Christ, to focus on passing their faith to the next generation. Ken Castor suggests that God initiated this practice in the Garden of Eden. He writes,

In both the Old and New Testaments, God ordains His followers with an inherent mission of equipping the next generations to embrace and spread the good news of Jesus. As God worked to solidify the identity and mission of His people, God conveyed a generational vision: that God’s principles and character be passed on to children and grandchildren so that future people would come to know God.<sup>1</sup>

God cares for all people without bias toward age, gender, ethnicity, or spiritual maturity. Therefore, all who profess to follow Him should share His mission: “desiring all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.”<sup>2</sup>

The practice of a local congregation focusing time, energy, and other resources on the Christian education of its adolescent members is so commonplace today that it may be challenging to picture a time when that was not

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1. Ken Castor, “God’s Equipping Pattern for Youth and Young Adult Ministry,” in *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, ed. Terry Linhart, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 189.

2. 1 Timothy 2:4 (ESV).



the status quo. In his book, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*, Andrew Root helps clarify what many congregations have experienced concerning youth ministry,

Youth Ministry had only been a part of the church for the last hundred years or so, and had existed in its present form only for the last four or five decades. Youth ministry developed due to cultural reasons more than theological ones, because we have societal institutions like high school that divide age cohorts into a group that then forms a distinct culture and a marketing niche.<sup>3</sup>

Youth ministry should not be undervalued. A congregation which seeks to better educate, train, and equip its adolescent members through a youth ministry program shows a certain degree of cultural awareness and sensitivity. In a way, youth ministry serves as the church's response to cultural trends in society, offering a setting which extends beyond a club, team, or organization. Teenagers have a chance to ask questions, build relationships, and learn more about their faith together.

But is youth ministry necessary? This a question both Root and Castor indirectly ask. If it is, what theological principles are utilized in its pursuit? The church is validated as it seeks to minister to younger generations, stemming from an indirect scriptural mandate. Two passages which support this pursuit include Proverbs 22:6 and Deuteronomy 6:4–9. These passages emphasize the importance of God-fearing parents and a greater faith community. Additionally, these passages provide insight considering various spiritual practices and disciplines that make up the core of youth ministry: mentorship and discipleship.

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3. Andrew Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 32.

## Exegesis

### Proverbs 22:6

**Train a child in the way he should go; even when  
he is old he will not depart from it.<sup>4</sup>**

The application of this proverb plays an integral role in how congregations seek to minister to younger generations. The key to the verse is found in the very first word: the Hebraic verb *ḥānōk*, which means “to train, dedicate, or inaugurate.”<sup>5</sup> In his commentary on Proverbs, Andrew Steinmann suggests that apart from this proverb’s notoriety, the meaning of *ḥānōk* is not attested in other parts of the Hebraic scriptures in the sense of training. He states,

“ . . . it primarily denotes consecrating and starting a child along a certain course in life. After the coming of Christ, this is fulfilled by parents who lead their children to become disciples of Jesus by Christian Baptism and by teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded in His Word (Mt 28:19–20).<sup>6</sup>

This verse cautions those who wish to abide by this proverb as they raise their children: this is a time-intensive endeavor. There is no data supporting any assumption that this will be a simple task or that it will be a small investment of time and resources.

Studying this verse becomes more interesting when considering families with multiple children. While siblings may share similar qualities and characteristics, each one is a unique individual with a personality, mannerisms,

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4. (ESV).

5. “Chanak,” Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon—New American Standard, Bible Study Tools, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/chanak.html> (accessed January 04, 2018).

6. Andrew Steinmann, *Proverbs* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2009), 441.

hobbies, irritations, and fascinations. In *The Interpreters Bible* commentary on Proverbs, Rolland Schloerb states that the author of this particular verse saw that each child has needs, impulses, and urges which need to be addressed by his or her parents. To let a child be free from any consequences for their actions is not beneficial for their long-term development and maturation; there must be direction and discipline, or else the child will become “a little dictator or an insufferable egocentric in his home.”<sup>7</sup> Steinmann states that a child should be instructed according to his or her age, capabilities, and aptitude for learning. This customization of training helps a child better grasp what he or she is being taught.<sup>8</sup>

The need for parents to train their children bears more weight in the Hebrew because *ḥānōk* parses out into an imperative verb (second person plural).<sup>9</sup> To say that parents are under pressure in passing on their faith to their children is an understatement. Proverbs 22:6 gives them a two-fold charge: to train their offspring in the pathway of faith and to do so in the manner best suited to them based on personality, age, and stage of development. Talking about one’s faith with a preschooler is remarkably different from discussing it over coffee with a junior in high school.

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7. Rolland W. Schloerb, *The Book of Psalms—The Book of Proverbs* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), 880.

8. Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 441.

9. Proverbs 22:6, Bible Hub Interlinear, <http://biblehub.com/interlinear/proverbs/22-6.htm> (accessed December 29, 2017).

The end goal for training a child in the faith is that they might make that faith their own. However, there is no guarantee that a child will adopt their parents' faith, regardless of how astute, gracious, and loving the parents are. It is improper to read any proverb as though it were a promise of what will happen based on action that has taken place. The lack of faith-transference from one generation to the next can be devastating, especially between parents and their children. Paul E. Koptak provides helpful and straightforward insight on this verse, stating that it “should never be interpreted so caring parents whose offspring give up the faith or get into trouble are at fault.”<sup>10</sup> While it is a societal norm to consider parents as the primary caretakers of their children, the sense of parental responsibility often transcends the “adult milestone” which causes many parents to feel burdened and somewhat at fault for poor decisions their child makes. Doubts may plague the minds of otherwise joyful people, causing them to wonder what went wrong and what they might have done differently that could have prevented the lack of faith in their child.

Thinking this way is unhealthy and unhelpful since the decision to accept or reject the salvific work of Jesus Christ belongs solely to the individual. While parents can teach and encourage their children, they cannot control their desires or decisions. Solomon himself serves as an example of one who—despite having a father who is described as being a man after God's own heart<sup>11</sup>—fell away from faith as he joined his many wives in worshiping the gods of their homelands.<sup>12</sup>

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10. Paul E. Koptak, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 517.

11. 1 Samuel 13:14.

Commentator Bruce Waltke echoes this, stating, “The proverb...must not be pushed to mean that the educator is ultimately responsible for the youth’s entire moral orientation. Rather, it gives a single component of truth that must be fit together with other elements of truth in order to approximate the more comprehensive, confused patterns of real life.”<sup>13</sup>

Proverbs 22:6 is a fitting verse to look at in light of youth ministry because it displays an imperative command for children to be taught in “the way they should go” by older generations—especially by their parents. Parents must be involved in a congregation’s youth ministry regardless of its setting. Speaking more generally, this proverb also points to the need of older generations to teach, train, and display what a life of faith looks like to younger generations. The main benefit is highlighted at the end of the verse: “when he is old he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6 teaches that adults who faithfully and continually teach and train their children in the way of righteousness are making a long-term investment in their lives. The result of this endeavor is that their children are likely to follow that course when they enter adulthood. In summation, youth ministry offers an opportunity for older generations to pass on their faith to adolescents.

#### **Deuteronomy 6:4–9**

**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when**

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12. 1 Kings 11:1–8

13. Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15-31* (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing, 2005). 206.

**you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**

Like Proverbs 22:6, Deuteronomy 6:4 starts with an imperative verb:

*sh'mah* (pronounced sha-mah), that is, “to hear, to listen, to obey.” It is the first of many imperative verbs in these verses, as noted by *The NIV Application*

*Commentary*, followed by “hear,” “love,” “impress,” “talk,” “tie,” and “write.”<sup>14</sup>

The *sh'mah* refers specifically to verse four and is a command that demands immediate and personal application in the lives of those who hear it. Eugene H. Merrill states that the call to “hear” is not just an invitation to listen: “to hear God without putting into effect the command is not to hear Him at all.”<sup>15</sup> This command is for the community to recognize the primacy of the LORD<sup>16</sup> on a national level as they were about to settle into the land promised to their ancestor, Abraham, in Genesis 17:8.

Martin Luther indicates an additional significant point about the *sh'mah* as he views the command in light of obedience to the Ten Commandments:

Note that he himself explains the First Commandment in a positive way, namely, that the Lord is one . . . . But he treats this unity of God in the Spirit; that is, he makes the point not only that God is one, but also that he should be regarded as one by us. Merely to say that He is one God conveys no meaning to us. However, that He is regarded as one God and

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14. Daniel Isaac Block, *Deuteronomy*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 181.

15. Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), 162.

16. In their scriptures, Israelites never spelled or said the sacred name God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 6:14. Whenever this name was read aloud from the text, the reader was to pronounce the name as “Jehovah” instead of “Yahweh.” This distinction is made in the English language by capitalizing the letters in “LORD.”

as our God (as he says here) is salvation and life and the fullness of all the Commandments.<sup>17</sup>

The connection of the *sh'mah* to the Commandments is significant, especially in light of the First Commandment: you shall have no other gods before me. God states that He is a jealous God. He is the Author of Creation and Sustainer of Life; the Holy LORD with whom the Israelites identify. God's heart for His people is that they would adore and worship Him out of holy fear and a righteous trembling, to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly before Him.

Consider the words of Jesus from John 14:21: "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me." Daniel Isaac Block comments,

Answering to the Supreme Command, by uttering the Shema the Israelites were declaring their complete, undivided, and unqualified devotion to Yahweh. This is not strictly a monotheistic confession (cf. 4:35, 39) but a cry of allegiance, an affirmation of covenant commitment that defines the boundaries of the covenant community.<sup>18</sup>

Through the benefit of hindsight, the Israelites erred in two ways when it came to the application of this commandment. The first error was forsaking God entirely through the worship of the gods of the neighboring nations, causing them to suffer God's judgment. The second error was through obedience to the point of legalism.<sup>19</sup> Matthew 23:1–26 records that people were following God's Law so strictly that obedience became more burdensome than joyful.<sup>20</sup>

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17. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, vol. 9 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Daniel Poellot (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 67.

18. Block, *Deuteronomy*, 182.

19. As was seen in the Pharisees.

20. Matthew 23:1–36.

One final point should be made regarding verse 4: the *sh'mah* is a call for more than a specific tribe, a certain clan, or a particular family; instead, it extends to the entire community of Israel. This is mentioned in Matthew Henry's commentary on the passage: "Be careful and exact in teaching thy children; and aim, as by whetting, to sharpen them, and put an edge upon them. Teach them to thy children, not only those of thy own body (say the Jews) but all those that are anyway under thy care and tuition."<sup>21</sup> Jim Burns echoes the significance of this in his book, *Partnering with Parents in Youth Ministry*, stating that the community was given oversight for younger generations, whether or not the children were a part of their biological family.<sup>22</sup> What an awesome and tremendous responsibility the people of God have been given with the *sh'mah*!

Verse 5 touches on the Israelites' understanding of human existence as Moses begins to instruct them how they are to carry out the *sh'mah*. They were instructed to love and pursue God with their whole being—their entire self was to be devoted to that cause. According to Block, verse 5 contains three layers. The first is *lēb*, the heart. This is the mind, or the very core of one's being, from which thought and emotions metaphorically originate. The second layer is *nepeš*, the person. There are many other interesting possible meanings for this word in Hebrew, including "appetite," "desire," "emotion," or "passion," but it is best seen as referring to the entirety of a person. The final layer is *m<sup>v</sup>ôd*, the

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21. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Bible Study Tools, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/deuteronomy/6.html> (accessed July 26, 2019).

22. Jim Burns and Mike Devries, *Partnering with Parents in Youth Ministry* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2003), 57.



substance. While many Bible translations make the meaning of this word “might” or “strength,” Block suggests that the most accurate meaning extends to all the material possessions a person has at their disposal, including their land, tools, and home.<sup>23</sup> The whole self<sup>24</sup> ought to be involved when it comes to loving the LORD since anything less lays the groundwork for idolatry. Luther writes,

This means, not that we should love nothing else—since everything God has made is very good and should be loved—but that in love nothing should be made equal to or put ahead of God and the things that are of God, and that the love of all things is to be pressed toward fulfilling the love of God.<sup>25</sup>

It would also be beneficial to consider the interaction Jesus had with a teacher of the law in Mark 12:28–34. The teacher poses a question: Which is the greatest commandment? Jesus responds by quoting the *sh'mah* and states that it is the most important. He immediately follows the statement by pointing the man to the second greatest commandment: “love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>26</sup> Jesus’ two-fold answer is significant: love for God necessitates love for one’s neighbor.<sup>27</sup> Verses 6–9 provide direction concerning how these commands may be carried out in the community.

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23. Block, *Deuteronomy*, 183–184.

24. This point drives people towards total faith integration in their lives. The expression of faith should not be limited to participation in worship services, but ought to be totally engrained in every aspect of a person’s life. Some examples of this include how a person views their vocation, how they budget their money, how they behave in uncomfortable circumstances, how they treat the people around them (whether they know them or not), and how they occupy their time when no one is watching them.

25. Luther, *Lectures*, 69.

26. Mark 12:31.

27. Mark 12:31 footnote in the *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).

As Moses tells the Israelites about “these words,” he is referring back to the entire covenant God established with the nation, including the content of 6:4–5. P. C. Craigie points out the significance behind verse 6, stating that the commandments provided the framework by which the Israelites better understood God and His will. Because of this, their response was able to come from a foundation of greater understanding of what God was doing rather than to snap to obedience out of a spirit of legalism. This understanding would enable them to be better teachers of these laws to their children as they helped them understand, apply, and obey God’s commands.<sup>28</sup> The spirit of this verse is seen in one of the most significant gospel promises in the Old Testament, where God reveals to Jeremiah, “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”<sup>29</sup> God’s desire for Israel was obedience out of love for Him. The message of Deuteronomy is that the Israelites were to have God’s commandments simmering in their hearts, daily meditating on them, continuously putting them into practice.

The commandments of God (especially the *sh’mah*) were to be close at hand throughout the nation—a constant reminder everywhere a person could look. This was something the Israelites took literally, making special boxes called phylacteries and mezuzahs that would be bound around foreheads and posted on door frames throughout the nation.<sup>30</sup> These commandments were to be more than

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28. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 170.

29. Jeremiah 31:31–33.

just in the line of sight, however. They were to be impressed upon the children of Israel. Mark DeVries comments,

God's first provision for faith formation is the family. . . .God's provision for the Christian nurture of children begins with the family, the people who are there when those children lie down and when they rise up, who are there with their children when they sit down to eat or take a journey. No mention is made in this text of the priests taking responsibility! These early parents (and their Israelite kin) were not told to get their children to meetings or to worship (that was understood). They were commanded, instead, to talk about God and His commands throughout their daily activities.<sup>31</sup>

The beauty of these verses is that Moses was encouraging the families to utilize the larger faith community (literally the nation of Israelites) for help with the faith formation of their children. Regarding youth ministry within the local congregation, this is an open door for parents and the congregation to do likewise.

In the context of the Israelites, Block writes that "every adult Israelite is to be a teacher, seizing every opportunity for instruction."<sup>32</sup> The whole community was empowered to act as its accountability ballast. Whenever one family was unequipped, unqualified, or uncertain on how to teach or train their children, the rest of the community was to be available and ready to help whenever and wherever they saw a need.

These verses shed some beneficial and significant light for this thesis project. As in Proverbs 22:6, parents are given the responsibility of passing on

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30. Michael McGarry, "Youth Ministry as a Bridge Between Church and Home," (D.Min thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2014), 29.

31. Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 162.

32. Block, *Deuteronomy*, 185.

their faith to their children. This practice was to be done at every opportunity possible, including the mundane, not-so-teachable moments. The family was able to receive help from the community since these commands did not differ among families. This practice is applicable today since Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, reproof, correcting, and training in righteousness.<sup>33</sup>

Even though the like-minded community is an invaluable tool, adults may still struggle with knowing how to best accomplish their task of discipling their children. Recalling a point from Proverbs 22:6, not every child will learn the same way. It is here where the congregation ought to step up as “spiritual reinforcements.” The local congregation should be the primary source from which parents cannot only receive encouragement but may also be equipped to fulfill their God-given role in teaching their children about faith.

## **DISCIPLESHIP AND MENTORING**

The centrality of discipleship amid a Bible-believing community must not be understated. It is the very task Christ gave the church before He ascended into heaven in Matthew 28. It is the mission which separates a congregation from other community groups/organizations. A valid and challenging question a congregation must ask is: how can the congregation provide serious, valuable, and impactful opportunities for young disciples to practice what they have been learning and observing?

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33. 2 Timothy 3:16.

Before overviewing the numerous examples in both the Old and New Testaments that address the topic of discipleship and mentorship, it would be beneficial to define both terms. When reading books on Christian discipleship, there are common characteristics in definitions, yet also some subtle differences. For instance, Merriam-Webster defines a disciple as “one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another, such as Christianity; a convinced adherent of a school or individual”<sup>34</sup> while Gary McIntosh defines a disciple simply as “a learner or a pupil.”<sup>35</sup> He develops his definition later to propose that a disciple is not one who simply acquires knowledge but who also lives out what they have learned while teaching others to be disciples.<sup>36</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes the life of a disciple as “not a law, not a set of principles, a programme, or an ideal. Discipleship means Jesus Christ, and Him alone. It cannot consist of anything more than that . . . discipleship means adherence to Christ, and, because Christ is the object of that adherence, it must take the form of discipleship.”<sup>37</sup> Jared C. Wilson echoes Bonhoeffer’s view of discipleship by asking: “What is discipleship, then, but following Jesus not on some religious quest to become bigger, better, or faster but to become more trusting of his mercy toward our total inability to become those things?”<sup>38</sup>

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34. Merriam-Webster, s.v. “discipleship,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discipleship> (accessed January 8, 2018).

35. Gary McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth: How You Can Work with God to Build a Faithful Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 65.

36. McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth*, 65.

37. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 51.

Many factors may cause a person to prefer one definition of discipleship over another. While some definitions highlight being a student of a master (in this specific context, Jesus), other definitions place more emphasis on the task of training others to be disciples. Multiple definitions, however similar they may be, can lead to confusion. For the sake of clarity, this project will utilize Wilson's definition.

Jim Burns offers some background to the term "mentorship" which aids in distinguishing it from "discipleship":

Mentoring is actually a very old concept. The word was first introduced in Homer's *Odyssey*. When Odysseus left to fight in the Trojan War, he charged his trusted friend, Mentor, with the responsibility of running his household. In some ways, the words "mentor" and "discipleship" have become interchangeable. Discipleship is a character-building relationship that takes what has been given by God and passes it on to another person, who in turn does the same (see 2 Timothy 2:2). Mentoring is similar in that it develops a proactive relationship, or role model, for someone to imitate the mentor's behavior or lifestyle.<sup>39</sup>

Burns is not wrong concerning the interchangeability of the two terms. Both involve more than one person. Both are a means by which a Christian may grow in spiritual maturity. Both serve as an opportunity for the recipient to be challenged in their behavior, worldview, and way of living. Jesus did not call His followers to be mentees—He calls them to be disciples. However, there are many biblical examples of mentorship that both precede and follow the Great Commission (Paul and Timothy, Barnabas and John Mark, Elijah and Elisha, Eli and Samuel).

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38. Jared C. Wilson, *The Imperfect Disciple* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 50.

39. Burns and Devries, *Partnering with Parents*, 59.

Consider the instructions Paul gives the church: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”<sup>40</sup> Christians are invited to observe his behavior, character, and mannerisms that through Paul, their relationship with Jesus might be strengthened. There is a crucial aspect of discipleship which involves learning *with* a fellow Christian—especially when it crosses generational lines. Even biblically literate parents and youth leaders may be caught off guard by a student’s question as they start to grapple with different elements of their faith. Discipleship allows both parties involved the chance to learn together as they follow the same Master.

Contrast this with the relationship which is formed in mentorship. A clear distinction is made in spiritual maturity between the mentor and the mentee. While discipleship allows Christians to learn *with* one another, mentorship is a chance to learn *from* another Christian. A mentee may learn from a more mature Christian whom they respect and wish to emulate not just through conversation and discussion, but through observation as well. In this relationship, they may directly see what it means to love one’s neighbor as one’s self, how to prioritize family time during a busy schedule, and how they might have a richer prayer life. In a way, a mentee is not unlike an apprentice, except rather than focusing on vocational transference, the goal is spiritual imitation.

David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock point out that formal education and training does not seem to matter when it comes to a mentoring relationship; what

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40. 1 Corinthians 11:1.

matters is perceived wisdom. They provide valuable and insightful data, stating that 65% of young adults (between 18-29 years old) who are active in their faith feel valued by those in older generations. 60% of this same demographic welcomes positive criticism from older Christians. Surprisingly, however, only 38% say that they are being mentored. This percentage is much higher than the 6% of those surveyed in the same age group who are unchurched. Given the perceived value from younger generations towards mentorship, Kinnaman and Matlock's data seems to suggest that this type of relationship ought to be further encouraged and actively pursued within the local congregation.<sup>41</sup>

When talking about models of discipleship in Scripture, it is necessary to look directly to the Gospels and study, observe, and marvel at the disciple-making genius of Jesus.<sup>42</sup> While He never lost sight of His ultimate mission, He structured His earthly ministry around the scaffolding of discipleship. In *Building a Youth Ministry That Builds Disciples*, Duffy Robbins provides this concept with greater significance: "Disciple was Christ's favorite word for those whose lives were linked with His. The Greek word for disciple, *mathetes*, is used 269 times in the Gospels and Acts."<sup>43</sup> Jesus was undoubtedly a miracle-worker who taught with authority. He spent time with societal outcasts and saw through the hearts and motives of man. The people Jesus chose to be His disciples were not the best and

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41. David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2019). 164.

42. This phrase is borrowed from a blog tag from Cadre Ministries. It's an excellent youth ministry blog that focuses on discipleship through personal time with others. [cadreblog.com](http://cadreblog.com)

43. Robbins, *Building a Youth Ministry*, 63.



brightest the world had to offer: fishermen, tax collector, zealot, and thief-turned-traitor made up most of their professions.

These men fought with each other, doubted, misunderstood Him, forgot His teaching, misspoke, and eventually either betrayed, abandoned, or denied Him. Consider the following observations from Allen Jackson:

Though teaching was a significant part of His ministry, the relationships He had with His followers provided the “living model” for His message. Formal moments of teaching, combined with the informal life together, produced a group of disciples who were “fully trained” (Luke 6:40–41) to carry on Christ’s commission.<sup>44</sup>

The Son of God knew what He was doing when He chose men who, although riddled with imperfections and character flaws, were empowered by the Holy Spirit and changed the world through their testimony. This picture of discipleship ought to be applied to every facet of ministry within a congregation, from the quilters to the Kids Club to the mid-week Bible study for senior members to Christmas programs to Fall Youth Retreats. Carrying the principles from Deuteronomy 6, Christians should use every moment to teach and show others how to follow Jesus. Discipleship to younger generations needs to be carried out by the local congregation regardless of whether its youth ministry is well-staffed, lacking in facilities, well established, or just starting to take shape.<sup>45</sup>

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44. Allen Jackson, “The Contribution of Teaching to Discipleship,” in *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, ed. Terry Linhart (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 5.

45. At this point, it is worth noting different components that may be involved in the disciple-making process, especially considering the role of both parents and the local congregation in this process. Among other characteristics and traits, discipleship may include formal catechesis (doctrinal education and training), preaching, teaching, opportunities for outreach and evangelism, accountability, service to those in need, etc.

A significant point to wrestle with is how discipleship is accomplished. Since Jesus is the person Christians are trying to emulate, it is perfectly logical to look to His practices as He trained His disciples. The primary way Jesus trained the disciples was through His teaching. Sharon Ketcham speaks to the power of teaching, calling it a means by which the people of God are empowered as growth is nurtured in “both knowledge and competence.”<sup>46</sup> Those being taught are both informed and moved to act upon that teaching. This makes it an essential piece of faith development and, in turn, necessary for the discipleship of younger generations.

James Stewart provides a valuable, comprehensive summary of the features and principles of Jesus’ teaching in his book, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*. He writes that Jesus’ teaching method was oral, not written—that is, Jesus never became a published author. His most profound teaching moments came from casual incidents and events.<sup>47</sup> He was always adapting His message to fit His audience. He not only matches and bests those with rigorous religious educations, but He appropriately relates to those who were scripturally illiterate.<sup>48</sup> The final method Stewart mentions is that Jesus taught with parables, illustrations, epigrams, and paradoxes. Summarizing the principles behind Jesus’ teaching, Stewart points out that He taught as one who had authority. He was not overly

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46. Sharon Galgay Ketcham, “Faith Formation with Others,” in *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, ed. Terry Linhart (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 111.

47. Matthew 12:10; 19:16; 22:17; Luke 9:46.

48. John 3:1–21; 4:7–26.

dogmatic and never forced assent, but He presented the facts to His disciples and other followers. He allowed men and women to think for themselves and, perhaps most importantly of all, He lived what He taught and loved those whom He taught.<sup>49</sup> Even a cursory glance at these principles can be overwhelming, especially considering that even the thought of teaching may make some uneasy at best. This point need not worry the would-be disciple-maker since Jesus' teaching was articulated by His presence with those He taught.

## FELLOWSHIP

The ministry of Jesus can truly be summed up in one word: incarnational. A beautiful picture of God's plan for redeeming the world is seen in John 1:14—"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The imagery used here is that Jesus, being fully God, humbled Himself and came down from heaven.<sup>50</sup> The Second Person of the Trinity not only took on the nature of man (with the exception of man's depravity) but *dwelt* among those He came to save. The Greek word used here is *eskenosen*, which translates as "tabernacle." This is a callback to the days of the tabernacle, specifically during Israel's time of wandering in the wilderness. The tabernacle was not only the center of worship and a place for offerings and sacrifices but was the place where God dwelt amid the camp.<sup>51</sup> It is difficult to imagine God seeing fit to dwell in such an intimate manner among His

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49. James S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* (New York: Abingdon Press, 2000), 64–71.

50. Philippians 2:6–8.

51. Exodus 40:34–38.

creation, but the implications and significance of the incarnation are the key to Jesus' disciple-making ministry. Doug Stevens sheds more light on this in *Called to Care: Youth Ministry for the Church*. He writes,

Beyond simply being here among us, Jesus took a deep personal interest in our lives. He never feigned friendship. Our interests and concerns were His. He was close to people, empathizing with their hurts and joys and aspirations, and He never adopted the typical style of the guru, aloof and distant, dispensing esoteric wisdom from some inaccessible peak.<sup>52</sup>

Jesus' ministry was messy by worldly standards, but there was a reason behind it:

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”<sup>53</sup>

The impetus behind incarnational ministry is the preposition “with” — incarnational ministry is done *with* others. In the book *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, Mark Yackonelli states,

In contrast to our lives of spinning isolation is Jesus' life of relationship and presence. Jesus' presence, His capacity to love and be with people, is transformative. You can see it in the way He listens, shares food, spends time, weeps, walks, touches, responds, and cares for others. Jesus enjoys being with people. He enjoys being with God. His ministry, it seems, doesn't come from a pre-planned formula but instead arises in response to the real situations and relationships He encounters. If we want our young people to live lives of faith, we need to live into the presence of Jesus. If the Christian faith is to offer any light, love, or truth to young people, we have to move beyond words. We have to share not only the teachings of Jesus but more importantly the presence of Jesus. What does it mean to be present? It means being open and available to others with as much of ourselves as possible, as unguarded as possible. To be present is to be awake to the Mystery of God within each moment. It means relating to

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52. Doug Stevens, *Called to Care: Youth Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 22.

53. Mark 2:17.

youth in the way Jesus related to people—with authenticity and transparency.<sup>54</sup>

Robbins similarly states: “Authentic discipleship always points our students back to Jesus. We begin with Him, we end with Him, and we journey with Him at all points in between.”<sup>55</sup> While numerous books, tracts, blogs, sermons, videos, and curriculum may be produced, published, and touted by various organizations about discipleship methods, Jesus ought to be the center of it all.

Kinnaman desires to see people of all ages be reconciled to Christ, being accomplished through moving past what he labels as “generational clutter.”<sup>56</sup> He proposes that one of the greatest opportunities a church has to meet the needs of modern culture, regardless of context and setting, is to move past isolationism towards genuine relationships that are forged in love and not solely from an appreciation of what a person has to offer or what they are able to produce.<sup>57</sup> In other words, relationships that are not based on consumption but are mutually beneficial.

Churches that seek to disciple the next generation are, by definition, encouraging and supporting their younger members to become more like Jesus. While Jesus is present in the midst of His church in all but physical appearance, the members of the congregation have an opportunity to be His ambassadors as

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54. Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 21–22.

55. Robbins, *Building a Youth Ministry*, 63.

56. Kinnaman, *Faith for Exiles*, 120.

57. Kinnaman, *Faith for Exiles*, 124.

Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5:20–21. As people continue to pursue their relationship with Christ, a perceptive leader of the congregation (i.e., a youth minister) may notice children and adolescents gravitating toward individual members more than others. In the spirit of encouraging discipleship to take place within the local congregation (especially between older and younger generations), it would be wise for church leadership to encourage a formal mentoring relationship to develop.

Intentionality is vital when it comes to disciple-making. Castor writes that in the Old Testament’s generational handoff of faith, there were two common traits in place: the members of the older generation had a vibrant relationship with God and the members of the younger generation were purposefully given an opportunity to put what they were observing and learning into practice in a meaningful way. “Younger-generation leaders humbly partnered in mission with the older-generation leaders. Transfer of leadership authority and vision involved a trusting relational core. Sharing leadership was altruistic—for the sake of the community.”<sup>58</sup>

The eyes of disciple-makers must always be on Jesus, actively pursuing the heart of Christ as they commit to the serious and fairly taxing task of disciple-making. To be physically distant and emotionally unavailable is not an accurate representation of Jesus’ ministry. He became hungry and thirsty with the disciples, He felt compassion for the downtrodden, He rejoiced with those who

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58. Castor, “God’s Equipping Pattern,” 190.

were celebrating, and He wept with those in mourning. Jesus got His hands dirty as He lived and experienced life right alongside those who followed Him. To follow the example of Jesus means that disciple-makers ought to get off the sidelines and accept whatever life may throw at them during this process.

This process will, in general, not be a short one. Yaconelli states that helping youth get plugged into a life of faith takes time. “When you develop a relationship with a young person, it’s important to understand that you are beginning a conversation that will last many years, even a lifetime.”<sup>59</sup> It is understandable why some may hesitate to accept the formal role of being a mentor given the sizeable cost, but even if a Christian is not intentionally mentoring someone, they are still caught in the crosshairs of the command Jesus gives His disciples in Matthew 28:19–20 to go into the whole world and make disciples.

Jackson shows how discipleship helps pass the faith from one generation to the next. He states that Christian teaching ought to shape students toward maturity. “We want them to have more than a ‘bumper sticker’ theology where they can say short catch phrases but can’t explain what they mean with any structure or connection to the Christian faith.”<sup>60</sup> True discipleship pulls the younger generation out of the Sunday School classroom into the mission field that

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59. Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, 214.

60. Jackson, “Contribution of Teaching,” 7–8.

surrounds them. It causes them to be mindful of the needs of the people around them as they consider how the gospel fits into their culture and community.

Disciple-making within the family (between parents and their children) is still of the utmost importance, but that does not mean that immediate family members are the only ones who influence a child's development. Other influential adults include aunts and uncles, grandparents, teachers, employers, professional athletes, bus drivers, coaches, neighbors, celebrities, and friends of the family. It is both wise and beneficial for a congregation to encourage discipleship to take place within families while helping parents maximize their effectiveness in training their children by encouraging discipleship to take place in naturally occurring (platonic) relationships outside of the nuclear family.

### **Summation**

If youth ministry (as it is recognized in the early 21st century) developed due to cultural patterns instead of any real theological need, is it necessary for congregations to have ministries that are solely focused on emerging generations? The simple answer to this question is yes; there is a very real need for a community of believers to minister to all its members, including those in emerging generations. How this ministry is carried out is allowed a fair amount of flexibility. Consider the following quote from Andrew Root:

Youth ministry developed largely in response to . . . cultural realities more than any particular theological need. But that doesn't mean there is nothing theological about youth ministry, only that it is all the more



important that we expose not only our intentions but also our motives to the light of theological reflection.<sup>61</sup>

Congregations should not be questioning the scriptural validity of youth ministry. Instead, they should question whether or not they are faithful to Scripture when it comes to making disciples.

The exegetical study of Proverbs 22:6 and Deuteronomy 6:4–9 provided straightforward instructions regarding the role God has given to parents. They are to pass on their faith to their children with discernment by making the most of every opportunity—from highly poignant moments to the mundane. Their faithfulness to God’s command does not guarantee that their children will make the faith their own when they are older, but parents are still the key disciple-makers of their children and are called to obedience. These verses also shed light on the importance of a faith community in the discipleship process.

Other key factors from Scripture that support youth ministry within the local congregation are discipleship and mentorship. Parents are the most influential adults in a child’s life, but other significant adults have a part to play and should be purposefully utilized to assist parents in the raising of their children. The community of believers is a gift from God (although there are times when it may not seem like that is the case). People serve and support each other as a church so that they may be stronger together. Where one falls, the other may pick them up. Where one is weak, the other is strong. When one experiences sorrow, the others can mourn, and when one has joy, the others can celebrate.

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61. Root, *Taking Theology*, 32.

## CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Even though the central question to this thesis project may be simple and straight-forward,<sup>1</sup> the answers provided by experienced workers and leaders in the field of youth and family ministry tend to have a variety of elements. As a congregation seeks to honor and fulfill the biblical mandate of making disciples (focusing on younger generations), it should not be surprising when a youth ministry differs in some significant ways from the church down the road. Differences in youth ministry praxis emerge due to a variety of variables, predominant among them is different philosophies of ministry and programming.

A philosophy of programming/ministry structure within a congregation is like a spray nozzle for a garden hose. Just because water is coming out does not mean that the right setting is selected. For instance, watering plants on the “full” setting could result in a total loss of a garden while using “mist” to rinse the mud off a vehicle could take a fortnight. Opinions regarding the use of the hose demonstrate the power and importance of a philosophy of ministry. While it may be tempting to try and discover the one “setting” that will work any time in any congregation, this pursuit would be in vain. It is, therefore, worth exploring and studying different philosophies and models of youth ministry.

In this literature review, different models of youth ministry will be examined by utilizing Michael and Michelle Anthony’s book, *A Theology for*

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1. “How might a rural congregation seek to strengthen its youth ministry?”

*Family Ministries*, as well as *Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views*, to which Paul Renfro, Brandon Shields, and Jay Strother contributed. After summarizing models of youth and family ministry, different ministry praxes will be compared with and against each other, including *Reciprocal Church* by Sharon Ketcham; *A Weed in the Church* by Scott Brown; *Thriving Youth Ministry in Smaller Churches* by Rick Chromey and Stephanie Caro; *Center Church* by Timothy Keller; *Growing Young* by Kara Powell Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin; and *This Way to Youth Ministry* by Duffy Robbins. Additional resources will be utilized to expand or clarify specific points.

### **Summarizing Ministry Models**

As stated previously, it is to be expected that some noticeable differences exist concerning the practice of ministry to families/younger generations among different congregations. Each congregation not only has a unique setting with potential outreach opportunities; they also have entirely different families that comprise their membership. Jim Burns states, “There is no one right way to be family-based—no cookie-cutter mold we need to fill. There are going to be some familial similarities, but just as our students and their families are diverse, so will the expression of that similarity take on many forms.”<sup>2</sup>

There is a significant common thread which Burns touches on later in the same book: family ministry ought to serve as a paradigm rather than a program. “It is ministering to youth in the most Biblical and effective way possible by

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2. Burns and Devries, *Partnering with Parents*, 18.

equipping and empowering the most influential people in a teenager's life—their parents.”<sup>3</sup> This was reflected in the previous chapter while studying Proverbs 22:6 and Deuteronomy 6:4–9. As parents strive to carry out their God-given task of raising and training their children in the faith, congregations that seek ways to partner with them tend to fall into one of three ministry patterns: family-based, family-equipping, and family-integrated.

Each of these models is an attempt to make a marked change from what Timothy Jones and Randy Stinson identify as “programmatically ministry.” They summarize this ministry model as follows:

Ministries are organized in separate “silos” with little consistent intergenerational interaction. “Family ministry,” when it exists, is one more program. The program may provide training, intervention, or activities for families. In scheduling programs, churches may deliberately seek to be sensitive to family's needs and schedules.<sup>4</sup>

Congregations seeking to break from this pattern have realized that the addition of one more activity or program to an already over-full calendar is not effective in an increasingly postmodern, hyper-individualistic culture. The broad ministry patterns that comprise each model may guide congregations to form and carry out their unique ministry opportunities in a new way.

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3. Burns and Devries, *Partnering with Parents*, 41.

4. Timothy Paul Jones and Randy Stinson, “Family Ministry Models,” in *A Theology for Family Ministries*, ed. Michael and Michelle Antony (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 179.

## Family-Based

Out of the three ministry models, none are as close to “programmatic ministry” as family-based since a congregation utilizing this model maintains multiple age-specific ministries. In addition to a ministry geared specifically for youth, the congregation may have a women’s ministry, a men’s prayer breakfast, a college-age Bible study, and a children’s ministry. The one significant difference, however, is that each specific ministry is encouraged to look for ways to draw the generations within a congregation closer together.

An example of this is intentionally utilizing a Sunday School curriculum that is designed for all ages, from toddlers to senior citizens. Every lesson brings each class through the same passage but is presented in a way that reflects and honors different age groups. Doing this allows each member within the congregation an opportunity to connect about the same lesson with different generations.

Brandon Shields comments that this model may be appealing to churches because “there is no pressing reasons for radical reorganization or restructuring of present ministry models. There is certainly no need for complete integration of age groups. What churches need to do is refocus existing age-appropriate groupings to pattern intentionally with families in the discipleship process.”<sup>5</sup> To its credit, this model seeks to honor the fact that different age groups tend to learn, fellowship, and worship in unique ways. Family-based ministries seek to unify

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5. Brandon Shields, “Family-Based Ministry” in *Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 98–99.

each specific ministry under a common banner and mission: “every ministry will consistently plan events and learning experiences that draw families and generations together.”<sup>6</sup>

### Family-Equipping

Joining the family-based model with the utilization of age-specific ministries within a congregation, the family-equipping model recognizes and prioritizes the role of parents as primary disciple-makers within their homes. The significant difference of the family-equipping model is that churches “redevelop their entire structure to call parents to disciple their children.”<sup>7</sup> The equipping and training of parents within the congregation is prioritized in every step of ministry to emerging generations. The family-equipping model emphasizes the importance of the church partnering with the family in the spiritual formation of students.

Mike McGarry proposes that a bridge must be built between the church and the family—that bridge is youth ministry. He theorizes that the church which prioritizes and welcomes younger generations will see a youth ministry that extends far beyond formal programs or events. Likewise, the family that is equipped and trained to disciple their children will only build on the impact of the church on younger generations. McGarry is not a hopeless optimist; he sees potential shortcomings in the effort to partner with parents, including inconsistency on the part of parents and the church, some

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6. Jones and Stinson, “Family Ministry Models,” 174.

7. Jones and Stinson, “Family Ministry Models,” 175.

reluctance/unwillingness from parents, and an unperceived notion that youth ministry should be parent-free as much as possible.<sup>8</sup>

McGarry is not alone in desiring the church and the family to partner together. Both Reggie Joiner and Kristen Ivy are proponents of the family-equipping model. A cursory glance through the Orange website<sup>9</sup> will communicate an abundance of resources available to help churches and families partner together. The very premise of Orange is that the church (being yellow, representing the light of Christ to the world) and the family (being red, representing communal love and fellowship) partner together to make “orange.”

### Family-Integrated

The family-integrated model is perhaps the furthest away from programmatic ministry out of any of the three models. In this ministry model, there are no age-segregated ministries in a church *at all*. The mentality that drives this model is that if a church is going to do something, it will be done with all of its members, regardless of age. To clarify, Article XI of *A Declaration of the Complementary Roles of Church and Family* from the National Center for Family-Integrated Churches states: “We deny/reject the current trend in churches that ignores the family unit, is blind to strengthening it, systematically segregates

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8. Mike McGarry, “Building a Foundation with the Parents” in *Gospel Centered Youth Ministry*, ed. Cameron Cole and Jon Nielson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 95–97.

9. *Think Orange*, <https://thinkorange.com/> (accessed July 25, 2019).

it, and does not properly equip her members to be faithful family members.”<sup>10</sup>

Paul Renfro explains that there are three commitments which unify the churches which practice family-integrated ministry: a commitment to age-integrated ministry, a commitment to evangelism and discipleship in and through the home, and a commitment to calling church leaders to manage their homes as Scripture prescribes (1 Timothy 3:4).<sup>11</sup> The practice of this ministry model is perhaps best seen in the setting of the worship service. Rather than separating families during the worship service by offering students an alternative like “Children’s Church,” the whole family worships together. Jones clarifies that they are not redefining the nature of the church;<sup>12</sup> instead, they view their ministry as a church to be “a family of families.”<sup>13</sup> This view will be examined further in Scott T. Brown’s *A Weed in the Church*.

### A Brief Analysis

Congregations may find it a bit difficult to define which ministry model they subscribe to fully. It is possible for more than one model to be descriptive of their current ministry to families, taking on a sort of hybrid. Due to what is

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10. NCIFIC, “A Declaration of the Complementary Roles of Church and Family,” [ncfic.org/about/276](http://ncfic.org/about/276) (accessed July 30, 2019).

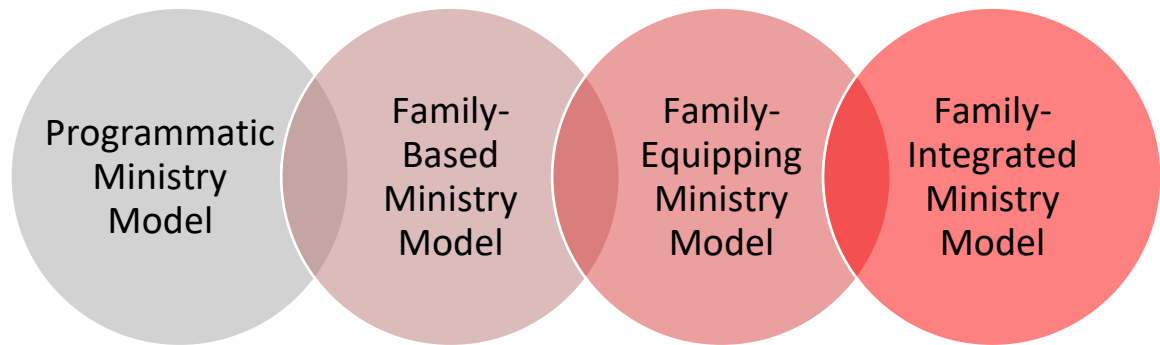
11. Paul Renfro, “Family-Integrated Ministry” in *Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 62.

12. Jones and Stinson, “Family Ministry Models,” 175.

13. This description is borrowed from Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 191–195.



entailed in each model, some are not compatible together. This point is better seen in figure 1.<sup>14</sup>



*Figure 1 – Family Ministry Models*

Family ministry is accomplished in many ways across multiple ministry contexts. While giving careful consideration to the biblical principles mentioned in the previous chapter,<sup>15</sup> congregations ought to assess which model is the most helpful for their particular context when it comes to assisting parents with raising, teaching, equipping, and training a younger generation in the Christian faith. In summation, the Family-Based Model allows for age-specific ministries while simultaneously seeking ways to bridge across generational barriers and differences. The Family-Equipping Model also allows for age-specific ministries, but is more intentional towards equipping parents to be the primary disciple-makers of their children. The Family-Integrated Model does not have age-specific ministries, believing that anything worth doing as a faith community ought to be done together.

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14. Jones and Stinson, “Family Ministry Models,” 176.

15. Discipleship, mentorship, and Christian community.

## Comparing Ministry Philosophies

### *Reciprocal Church*

by Sharon Ketcham

Sharon Ketcham quickly describes what she means when she refers to a “reciprocal church” —reciprocal motion refers to a continual motion in more than one direction (back and forth).<sup>16</sup> Like other authors in this literature review, she also quickly identifies a problem within congregations: the loss of people from our churches is what is finally capturing our attention.<sup>17</sup> Rather than consider how this applies solely to ministries to younger generations, she broadens her scope to include all ages within the church. It is a brilliant move on her part, making more and more sense as the book progresses. “The loss of rising generations from our churches means we need to reflect on the church—and resist treating young people as a problem to solve.”<sup>18</sup> While youth ministry practitioners are among the growing host of people with an opinion on how to “fix” the problem, Ketcham wisely suggests that the best solution to any issue within a local congregation will come from the congregation itself rather than being imposed upon it.<sup>19</sup>

Ketcham gives her readers cause to consider their ecclesiology, especially in the context of how limited it might be. The radical personalization of the gospel

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16. Sharon Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church: Becoming a Community Where Faith Flourishes Beyond High School* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 1.

17. Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church*, 3.

18. Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church*, 9.

19. Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church*, 18.

is dangerous, bringing an individual to the doorstep of an improper understanding of God, theology, and fundamental Christian doctrine. “This gospel package is prevalent, to various degrees, across the Christian traditions. I am not saying this message is inaccurate. Surely the Gospel is personal. I am saying that it is an incomplete message. The Gospel is much bigger than *me* and my personal religious experience.”<sup>20</sup> Ketcham also points out that community of any variety is voluntary and, when coupled with a culture of radical individualism, poses no small complication to the community of faith.

A further point Ketcham makes is regarding the words Christians use to describe what they are attempting to do. For example, she suggests that “passing on the faith” is good in theory but must be separated from the idea that faith is the one service offered by the church. One of the more significant dangers of the church being viewed as a provider of religious services is that it allows for hyper-individualism to enter a Christian context. Rather than being a part of the community, members are out solely for their interests. Ketcham believes that to be focused solely on one’s self-interest is to miss out on the reconciliation-based relationships that come with a genuine faith community. These relationships are vital “because relationships are a means of grace.”<sup>21</sup> While she clarifies her meaning later on, this comment is almost an overstatement. Christian community does not bestow grace like a sacrament; it is instead a means by which Christians

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20. Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church*, 27.

21. Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church*, 68–69.

see the forgiveness of God conveyed through the act of forgiving others. Her clarification is as follows:

Relationships within the faith community matter because they are a primary avenue for the Spirit's powerful, liberating activity. We, the church comprised of confessing Christ-followers of all ages, are the temple of the Holy Spirit and are being built into a dwelling place for God. God's presence with us in Christ confirms our shared identity and the Spirit's power is our source for the seemingly impossible call to live as a reconciled people.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, the Christian faith is personal, but it is not meant to be done individually. Forgiving one's neighbor is a grace-filled act for two reasons: it reminds us what Christ has done on the cross, and, in turn, reminds us of the biblical mandate to love one's neighbor.<sup>23</sup>

A proper view of Christian community is essential because it is a fundamental element of Christian identity. Ketcham writes,

The relationship between a Christian and the church is vital . . . . The church is the people. Church is not where we go (building) or what we join (organization). We do not have a church (possession) or choose a church (product). The church is who we are. To say the church is a people belonging to God is to affirm our shared identity forever linked with God's covenant people we read about in the Old Testament.<sup>24</sup>

Emerging generations are sensitive to authenticity, using personal experience to assess if the church is genuine or not. Congregations lose precedence when its message is not being carried out in its actions.<sup>25</sup>

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22. Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church*, 82.

23. Luke 13:25–37

24. Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church*, 53.

25. Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church*, 65.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing points Ketcham makes regards mutually beneficial relationships (as seen in the animal kingdom). Passing on the faith is a decent enough concept at face value, but there tends to be a single direction that accompanies this verbiage. A true reciprocal church community sees instruction and compassion go both ways between new and mature Christians.<sup>26</sup> In the sense of a mutually beneficial relationship within a church, Ketcham proposes that youth bring passion and adults bring wisdom and experience.<sup>27</sup> Mutuality helps to remove the potential for individuality taking root, allowing people to enjoy common traits while respecting and benefitting from their differences.

Mature Christians would do well to recognize the potential in younger Christians. Ketcham ties this concept to a healthy view of the *imago Dei*, viewing every person as image-bearers of God. Contextually speaking, this refers to students within the local congregation who are still developing physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.<sup>28</sup> “Let’s change the epidemic narrative. Young people are not problems to solve. God created them with potential to contribute to God’s redemptive purposes among us. Christ frees them from sin so that they are free for God. When we value contribution, a young person’s potential for God will thrive and flourish.”<sup>29</sup> In conclusion, Ketcham’s proposal

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26. Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church*, 108.

27. Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church*, 111.

28. Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church*, 138–139.

29. Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church*, 148.

seems to be two-fold: first, churches ought to have a proper view and practice of the Christian community, and second, they ought to include adolescents in that community.

*A Weed in the Church*

by Scott T. Brown

Scott Brown wastes no time in clearly stating the thesis for his book: “The thesis of this book is that the modern church has been overrun by an aggressively reproducing, non-native species that excludes or injures the desired crop. That weed is systematic, age-segregated youth ministry, and it has a profound impact on what God desires to be ‘a garden of renown’ (Ezek. 34:29).”<sup>30</sup> Brown is currently serving as the director of the National Center for Family-Integrated Churches. Based on the name of the organization, it should not be a surprise that Brown is very outspoken in his support for the family-integrated ministry model.

In his zeal for family-integrated ministry, Brown’s opposing stance to “modern youth ministry” borders on being aggressive. An example of this sentiment comes at the end of chapter 6 regarding those who do not practice family-integration:

We are not suggesting that churches that use this practice are intentionally pursuing paganism, but we are suggesting that they have inadvertently adopted non-Christian philosophies and practices for youth ministry. While the intentions of churches have been exemplary, their actions overthrew fixed revelation. In so doing, they began to dismantle the Biblical order of discipleship in the church and family life outside the church. However, the

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30. Scott T. Brown, *A Weed in the Church: How to Recover the Original Generational Design for Discipleship in the Church* (Wake Forest, NC: The National Center for Family-Integrated Churches, 2014), Loc. 35.

heart of the matter was this: the church adopted radical, unbiblical ideas because she diminished her reliance on Scripture alone.<sup>31</sup>

In short, he believes churches that practice “modern youth ministry” are not as reliant on God’s Word as churches which have forsaken age-segregated ministries. While he desires for this book to be a resource for people, he somewhat alienates people with a tone that suggests an “us-or-them” mentality.

Brown makes a blanket statement early in his book regarding the state of youth ministry in the American church: “Almost everyone involved in youth ministry agrees that something is wrong . . . people involved in various functions of church life want to talk about how to repair it.”<sup>32</sup> One has to wonder if as many people brainstorm how to “fix youth ministry” as Brown seems to believe.

Concerning the origin of this weed in the church, Brown states: “We believe age-segregated youth ministry is the result of apostasy in the church.”<sup>33</sup> He does not indicate who comprises the pronoun “we” —whether that be the NCFIC, other churches that practice family-integrated ministry, or some other party. As was quoted in Chapter 1, Andrew Root pushes back against this mindset, stating that youth ministry is a product of cultural changes more than theological needs.<sup>34</sup> There is no doubting that society has changed since the advent of the church nearly 2,000 years ago. Brown seems to believe that the

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31. Brown, *Weed*, Loc. 1490.

32. Brown, *Weed*, Loc. 164.

33. Brown, *Weed*, Loc. 339.

34. Root, *Taking Theology*, 32.

church must not fundamentally change its praxis of ministries based on trends or shifts in culture.

*A Weed in the Church* turns a blind eye to spiritually healthy, well-established, and growing ministries that exist in churches which are not integrating families in everything they do. It assumes these ministries are rare and are the exception, not the status quo. Brown further states,

If God, in the Bible, told you how to disciple your children and the young people in your church, would you not want to pay careful attention to what He said? If it were true that God's plan to reach children and teens is different from age-segregated youth group, would you not like to know it?<sup>35</sup>

Brown is not wrong when he states that youth ministry is not directly prescribed in Scripture, but is a congregation's pursuit of age-specific ministries truly a practice which warrants the label "pagan"?<sup>36</sup> Biblical instruction regarding discipleship and the general principles behind family ministry are enough of a platform from which congregations can still honor biblical doctrine while conforming to the pattern of secular culture.

Regarding the need for discipleship within the family setting, Brown believes that God's design of familial roles naturally lends itself toward discipleship. Brown provides an extensive list of areas in which fathers ought to instruct their children, including family worship, praising God, confronting rebellion, evangelism, and Sabbath-keeping. These are certainly admirable pursuits.<sup>37</sup> Blatantly absent from this list, however, is the gospel itself. Whether

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35. Brown, *Weed*, Loc. 757.

36. Brown, *Weed*, Loc. 1490.



this omission was unintentional or came from presuming that the gospel was already being taught, this is a significant oversight. All of his listed elements find their power, motivation, and ultimate fulfillment in what Christ has accomplished on the cross.

Brown does give his readers elements worth further consideration. There tend to be significant consequences when the church dabbles too much in culture. Doing so cultivates ministries that pursue marketing strategies rather than biblical practices.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, it is entirely possible for family discipleship to be moved to the backburner, so to speak, as congregations focus on developing programs.<sup>39</sup> Finally, Brown notes the deteriorating effect the pursuit of relevance/attractiveness can have on a youth ministry, making it “look more like a rock concert, coffee bar, or club rather than the holy people of God.”<sup>40</sup> In that regard, churches and youth ministries ought to honestly ask themselves what their endgame is when it comes to youth ministry. Is the goal of youth ministry to make disciples among younger generations? Or is it merely having cool programs and events for students to attend?

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37. Brown, *Weed*, Loc. 2165–2312

38. This will be covered more in the section on *This Way to Youth Ministry* by Duffy Robbins.

39. Brown, *Weed*, Loc. 306.

40. Brown, *Weed*, Loc. 180.

## *Thriving Youth Ministry in Smaller Churches*

by Chromey and Caro

Considering the struggles smaller congregations face in ministry compared to larger churches, it may be easy to develop a mentality where the former scrapes by month after month. With minimal resources, lack of staff, and smaller consistent attendance, there does not seem to be much keeping small, rural churches from closing their doors for good. Rick Chromey and Stephanie Caro would take issue with that mentality, arguing that smaller churches have many strengths in ministry that larger churches are not able to enjoy. “Smaller” is an intentionally chosen adjective by Chromey, who believes that “if you consider yourself ‘small’ you’ll think and act small and that’s not only detrimental, it can be disastrous and deadly.”<sup>41</sup>

Chromey promotes the strengths and advantages of smaller churches. Smaller churches tend to be more relational since smaller attendance allows everyone to know everyone else. Later on, Chromey believes that this allows the church to be more naturally inclined toward intergenerational ministry opportunities. Smaller churches are also described as “tough,” displaying resilience through crisis and conflicts. Smaller churches bring people into positions of leadership more quickly due to being volunteer based. Additionally, Chromey states that smaller churches more readily disregard the desire for high-quality performance in the church through the people who are involved. There is

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41. Rick Chromey and Stephanie Caro, *Thriving Youth Ministry in Smaller Churches: Secrets for Cultivating a Dynamic Youth Ministry* (Loveland, CO: Group Pub, 2009), 20.

also a tendency for volunteers to work in a wide area compared to larger churches where volunteers/staff specialize in a particular role. Finally, smaller churches have the freedom to be more spontaneous with their events; it is easier to plan a meal or a trip with a handful of students than it is to coordinate a mass of people.<sup>42</sup>

Chromey and Caro spend the remainder of their book fleshing out these points. They spend some time describing those involved in youth ministry in the smaller church setting. These may be people with no formal ministry degree or training. They are likely not even paid by their church for their efforts: “The unpaid volunteer is the largest segment of smaller church youth workers. Most congregations are simply too small to hire even a part-time person to lead the youth ministry.”<sup>43</sup> Smaller churches may even look to their pastor to lead the youth ministry. Whatever extent their involvement, “pastors must recognize the value of youth ministry and focus upon generating good will and a positive attitude about leading students.”<sup>44</sup> This means moving beyond just moral support into a role which helps cast a vision for what ministry to emerging generations could look like in their context.

Regarding the utilization of limited resources, Chromey suggests that it may be more financially responsible for churches to spend money on training volunteers and supplying them with resources than hiring a part-time youth

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42. Chromey and Caro, *Thriving*, 49–61.

43. Chromey and Caro, *Thriving*, 68.

44. Chromey and Caro, *Thriving*, 72.

worker.<sup>45</sup> This is not a bad point, so long as this does not mean that smaller churches are trying to fill the role with any warm body so they can move on to another area of concern. In discussing evangelism and genuine faith community, they do not make their case as well as others included in this literature review. Both Duffy Robbins and Kara Powell have a stronger, more effective argument regarding the need for a genuine faith community.

Concerning the means of evangelism and outreach proposed by Chromey and Caro, Rosaria Butterfield makes a much stronger case in her book, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*. While her book does not center on youth ministry, it is worth pointing out the extent her family has gone to practice what she describes as ordinary hospitality. She writes,

Practicing radically ordinary hospitality necessitates building a margin time into the day, time where regular routines can be disrupted but not destroyed. This margin stays open for the Lord to fill—to take an older neighbor to the doctor, to babysit on the fly, to make room for a family displaced by a flood or a worldwide refugee crisis. Living out radically ordinary hospitality leaves us with plenty to share, because we intentionally live below our means.”<sup>46</sup>

Butterfield sees her home as an opportunity for outreach in her neighborhood, recognizing that while everyone desires to belong to a genuine community, not everyone is comfortable darkening the doors of a church. In opening homes up for potential outreach, Butterfield expands and clarifies upon Chromey and Caro’s point.

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45. Chromey and Caro, *Thriving*, 74–75.

46. Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), Loc. 127.

The temptation to measure or gauge success in ministry according to “cultural instrumentation” abides. Chromey and Caro compare these standards with Jesus’ ministry practice: “The mission of Christ was not popularity, power, prominence, or prosperity, but service and sacrifice. . . . these days, Jesus probably wouldn’t be leading a workshop at a youth ministry convention.”<sup>47</sup> True success in any type of ministry lies not in the hands of the workers but in the hands of God. Spiritual growth and development in the lives of students may be unobservable, but that does not mean that God is not at work in their lives.

There are times throughout their book when their case for a healthy youth ministry is strong and biblically-based, while at other times, they seem to replace the pursuit of health with the desire to be culturally relevant. They believe smaller churches have an advantage for innovation within their ministry for relevance compared to their larger counterparts.<sup>48</sup> This book feels more anecdotal than academic, with Chromey making his case based on his own experience in ministry rather than finding studies that collected data from a broader range of churches. Regardless, this book is worth considering in this literature review due to the new positive perspective it offers smaller churches. That is, perceived setbacks may be possible opportunities when viewed in a different light.

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47. Chromey and Caro, *Thriving*, 39.

48. Chromey and Caro, *Thriving*, 17.

## *Center Church*

by Timothy Keller

While Tim Keller's book does not focus specifically on youth ministry within a congregation, it does warrant some consideration regarding general church philosophy and praxis in light of modern culture. The second half begins to apply more directly to the scope and parameters of this literature review. Keller proposes that the differences in ministry philosophy, while appearing to be doctrinal, boil down to a difference in how churches ought to relate to the modern culture.<sup>49</sup> Keller notes this difference in the answers provided to the same question over thirty years:

“In the 1940s, a Christian minister could say to almost any young adult in the country, “Be good!” and they would know what he was talking about. By the late 1970s, if you said, “Be good!” the answer would be “What’s your definition of good? I might have a different one. And who are you to impose your view on me?”<sup>50</sup>

Keller points to a cultural shift in America, especially as it concerns ministry practice as a whole.

While Americans once largely shared beliefs in certain moral and objective truths, this is no longer the case, calling for a shift in how ministry is done. In no uncertain terms, Keller believes it is in the church's best interest to engage with culture in a way which does not forsake the primary importance of remaining steadfast to scriptural truths. It is dangerous to not do so. He states:

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49. Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 181.

50. Keller, *Center Church*, 182.

“Culture is complex, subtle, and inescapable . . . and if we are not deliberately thinking about our culture, we will simply be conformed to it without ever knowing it is happening.”<sup>51</sup> In seeking to honor the biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, Keller encourages a healthy practice of cultural engagement as opposed to a more narrow approach.<sup>52</sup>

A person in the mid-20th century did not need to be a Christian to hold to a worldview that was mostly Christian. Due to this, Keller proposes that the church did not need to focus on engaging with culture. That is no longer a luxury the church has: “culture was no longer Christianized, and now the church was ‘on the mission field to the modern world,’ yet the church was captive to the culture of modernity and thus had no real alternative to offer.”<sup>53</sup> As a congregation attempts to rectify this, Keller seems to favor a two-fold approach: Believers must seek to serve, being “responsive to what God is already doing in the world.” Believers must also seek to translate biblical truths into a culture of individualism. “The church must redefine sin, mission and salvation in corporate and communal terms.”<sup>54</sup>

This means a more horizontal view of faith and its implications rather than a vertical view. Instead of focusing on one’s relationship with God, people are pointed toward how their faith relates to their fellow man:

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51. Keller, *Center Church*, 186.

52. Keller, *Center Church*, 227.

53. Keller, *Center Church*, 254.

54. Keller, *Center Church*, 257.

All those pursuing the missional church . . . believe that Christian mission is more than just a department of the church, more than just the work of trained professionals. The Biblical God is by nature a sending God, a missionary God . . . in a missional church, all people need theological education to “think Christianly” about everything and to act with Christian distinctiveness. They need to know which cultural practices reflect common grace and should be embraced, which are antithetical to the Gospel and must be rejected, and which practices can be adapted or revised.<sup>55</sup>

What does this mean for a youth ministry? Moreover, considering Ketcham’s view of the reciprocal community, what does this mean for the inclusion of younger generations in this model? While Keller does not directly state the implications of youth involvement, he certainly is not excluding them from the larger picture. Keller’s thesis is even more significant in light of how much culture impacts, informs, and influences younger generations.

The caution in engaging with culture is that the church must remain distinct from its depraved qualities and characteristics. Keller states,

The church can no longer be an association or a club but is a “thick” alternate human society in which relationships are strong and deep—and in which sex and family, wealth and possessions, racial identity and power, are all used and practiced in godly and distinct ways. However, while the Christian church must be distinct, it must be set within, not be separated from, its surroundings.<sup>56</sup>

Keller recognizes that not everyone who enters the doors of a church building will be biblically literate, calling the whole congregation to respond to people who do not yet believe. In light of this, the church must continually be about the work of equipping every believer for intentional community and pointed relationships in all aspects, moving people closer to the cross and a right relationship with God.

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55. Keller, *Center Church*, 258.

56. Keller, *Center Church*, 273.



This is why Keller pushes the importance of the church “firing on all cylinders” and not relying on a select few specific ministries or individuals.

*Growing Young*

by Powell, Mulder, and Griffin

In light of potentially worrying statistics regarding the change taking place in churches across the United States,<sup>57</sup> the authors of *Growing Young* offer an interesting alternative: what would a church look like if it focused on ministering to its families/younger members? Powell, Mulder, and Griffin are not so much pushing their readers toward a particular family ministry model as they are proposing strategies which would work in any church setting based on their research. “Churches who ‘grow young’ are engaging students between 15–29 years old and are growing spiritually, emotionally, missionally, and sometimes also numerically.”<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the first difficulty in the overall premise of this book is their insistence that, in order for a church to “grow young,” everyone needs to be on board and share this vision.

The difficulty is that priorities, ideologies, opinions, and traditions within a church setting do not change overnight. For instance, older members in a church may be vocal about the importance of youth being in the church, but they may be even more vocal about how the church ought to prioritize/focus more on any

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57. “Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics, and Statistics,” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project*, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/> (May 11, 2019).

58. Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 19.

number of things. Regardless, the authors are confident that “growing young” does not require any special conditions; any church can do it!

A significant amount of *Growing Young* is Powell, Mulder, and Griffin highlighting six keys. Their observations and suggestions are insightful, convicting, and extensive, making them difficult to summarize. The first of these keys is: “Unlock Keychain Leadership.” Churches desiring to grow young should seek to pass “keys of leadership” to other people. Doing so not only empowers others but also prevents church leadership from falling prey to the prideful mentality of being irreplaceable. Authority and leadership are not communicated by holding tightly to these “leadership keys.”

Second, older members ought to empathize with younger members. It is not enough to acknowledge the difficulties that face younger generations today; genuine empathy means joining students in the pit of their despair and on the mountaintop of their celebrations. It is only logical that empathetic adults would strive to remain informed on community needs and cultural trends and patterns.

The third key may well be the most important concerning the over-all spiritual health of younger generations: take Jesus’ message seriously. It is unfortunately entirely possible to read and present a gospel-saturated passage from Scripture<sup>59</sup> and miss the point. In this portion of their book, the authors invite their readers to give pause and consider the message teenagers and young adults are hearing from their spiritual leaders. Do they hear the gospel in all its

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59. Like John 3:16–17.

purity, or has it been distilled, tamed, miscommunicated, or entirely misunderstood? The authors challenge leaders to focus on the redemptive narrative woven into the fabric of every verse of Scripture. Consider the words of Charles Spurgeon: “A sermon without Christ in it is like a loaf of bread without any flour in it. No Christ in your sermon, sir? Then go home, and never preach again until you have something worth preaching.”<sup>60</sup>

Fourth, churches ought to fuel a warm community. In this instance, “warmth” indicates more of a sense of family than merely being kind to one another.<sup>61</sup> Tied closely with the second key, churches are invited to consider how they might embrace the mess of life rather than designing the next flashy program. Powell states, “Fueling warmth helps us live out good ecclesiology, our theology of church. The relationship of the Trinity and the metaphor of the body of Christ remind us that we belong to one another.”<sup>62</sup>

The fifth key is for churches to prioritize young people (and families) everywhere. While somewhat more intuitive than the others, this key strives to help youth *as well* as the larger family. The intention is not to isolate parents, but to help equip and partner with them—mainly falling in line with the family-equipping model. Two questions emerge: how can parents receive consistent

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60. Erik Raymond, “Spurgeon: Preach Christ or Go Home!” The Gospel Coalition, [www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/spurgeon-preach-christ-or-go-home/](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/spurgeon-preach-christ-or-go-home/) (August 7, 2010).

61. Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 169.

62. Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 193.

support from the church? Moreover, how might young people be involved in every facet of a church's ministry?

The last key is to be the best neighbors. The church building is a part of the community, and its members belong to the community. What, then, can the church do to benefit its community? "Congregations that aim to be the best neighbors keep their radar tuned to the good they find in culture and those outside their church. This doesn't imply wholehearted acceptance or that your church should pretend real differences do not exist. However, hospitable neighbors maintain both dialogue and relationship, especially when they disagree."<sup>63</sup> By listening to the needs of the community, the church may receive a more precise understanding of how to better minister to people.

While this book is enjoyable on its surface, perhaps it is best taken with a grain of salt. It is easy to read this book with rose-colored glasses due to the consecutive success stories of these keys being applied in different church contexts. Are there churches who have met with different results after attempting to apply these keys? If so, their stories do not seem to be taken into account. The authors even admit: "There is neither one easy step to take . . . that will lead your entire church to grow young . . ."<sup>64</sup> This is somewhat ironic since the same book seems to have the tone of being, in totality, that "one step." At the very least, it is

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63. Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 241–242.

64. Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 279.

fair to say that Powell, Mulder, and Griffin have provided churches with topics to discuss regarding their ministry to emerging generations.

*This Way to Youth Ministry*

by Duffy Robbins

Similar to *Growing Young*, Duffy Robbins' book addresses and presents principles from the realm of youth ministry, which may be implemented in churches regardless of their context. As the name suggests, this book presents information to leaders/adults in an introductory fashion. Robbins' sensitivity to the possible limited hands-on experience of his readers allows him the opportunity to delve into philosophy, ministry structure, and the design and implementation of programs. He also takes James Fowler's stages of development for adolescents into consideration, acknowledging that students learn differently and can internalize their faith in different capacities at various ages.

Robbins invites his readers to consider where they would like their students to be in ten to twenty years. When the destination is known, a strategy may be formed for how to get there. While adults cannot control the spiritual growth of students, that does not prevent them from wanting fewer failures and more successes. Similar to Proverbs 22:6, Robbins compares work in youth ministry like working in God's darkroom:

Some of them will turn out and some of them will not . . . But, along the way, it's an awesome privilege and a magnificent journey. By God's grace it will lead to . . . a corps of "improbables," "unlikelies," "impossibles," "who-would-have-guessed-she-coulds?" and "I-never-thought-he-woulds"

traveling together in an amazing quest—always further, always deeper, always closer.<sup>65</sup>

Are there steps a congregation can take that increase the effectiveness of a youth ministry? “Ministries spend their money, their people, and their time trying to build good youth programs without giving careful thought to two key questions: Where do we want to go? and Where are we now?”<sup>66</sup> Robbins points out five improper approaches taken by churches concerning their ministry to adolescents, the first of which is “bigger is better.” This approach tends to find churches more focused on the number of students that are attending than where they are leading them. In the “just say ‘mo’” approach, a youth ministry utilizes momentum and the addition of more events, resources, and effort to act as a ballast which will “right the ship.” Leaders earnestly seeking a “one-size-fits-all” prescription to ministry fall into the “follow the letter” approach. The fourth approach is “the highway and buy-way approach”; these are churches which may too readily jump at the chance to update or overhaul what is the current status quo. The final approach is “follow the star,” where the desire to have the “biggest and brightest” youth ministry on the block takes precedence.<sup>67</sup> To restate: Robbins does not prescribe a specific ministry practice for churches to implement, but he does encourage the development of a ministry philosophy.<sup>68</sup>

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65. Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry: An Introduction to the Adventure* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 416–417.

66. Robbins, *This Way*, 424.

67. Robbins, *This Way*, 424–425.

68. Robbins, *This Way*, 432–465.

The formation of this philosophy comes in four key phases. The first step is perhaps the most crucial to determine: the mission (why does this ministry exist?). Robbins answers this question—any youth ministry, regardless of context, must be focused on God in Christ. “The number one goal of youth ministry is . . . helping students develop a love relationship with God.”<sup>69</sup> A youth ministry must also call students to a life of service, build disciples, and establish what Powell identified as a “warm community.” “A biblical philosophy of youth ministry will take seriously the communal nature of discipleship, recognizing that a life worthy of Christ is marked by humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, ‘making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace’ (Eph. 4:1–3).”<sup>70</sup>

The additional three phases Robbins proposes follow a rough but systematic chronological progression. Churches must wrestle with the core values of their ministry, that is, how will the mission be carried out? After this second phase, the third and fourth phases becomes a little more practical: the vision (what will this ministry look like) and the strategy (what do we do now?).

Robbins fleshes these ideas out in the rest of his book but wisely does not push for any particular ministry model. He continues to encourage people to work together in unity, seeking to structure ministries in a way which honors Scripture rather than pursuing the next “big thing.”

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69. Robbins, *This Way*, 436.

70. Robbins, *This Way*, 455.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH PROJECT

The research project for this thesis consisted of five components: an initial questionnaire, special meetings on cultural topics, the formation of a team of student leaders, the establishment of intentional intergenerational relationships, and a follow-up questionnaire. The primary goal of this research project is to develop a tool which may be used by the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish to assess the current health of their ministry to adolescents. Two by-products may emerge as a result of this project:

1. Adults will be more informed about current trends and patterns in youth culture.
2. Students will be able to grow and develop leadership skills.

### **Project Design**

The Dalton Free Lutheran Parish provides a unique setting for this research project because it is comprised of three distinct congregations in a rural setting. To phrase the primary objective of this project in the form of a question: how might a three-point parish assess the current health of its shared youth ministry? Additionally, how might this research project be structured to measure the effectiveness of the components involved?

### **Component 1: The Initial Questionnaire**

An initial questionnaire was necessary to obtain quantifiable data at the conclusion. This questionnaire was designed to establish a baseline for the current health and effectiveness of the parish's youth ministry. It was structured to be



brief and precise while still covering a variety of topics and areas specifically concerning youth ministry as well as opportunities adolescents have to engage within the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish. Some of the focus areas within the questionnaire included:

- Current leadership opportunities for adolescents
- The over-all prioritization of ministry to youth and families
- Sensitivity and awareness of the demographics of the surrounding population
- The importance of community and fellowship
- The utilization of technology

Once the questionnaire was finalized, it was given to the council members of each congregation. A larger sample size for this research project could shed more light on the current strength of the parish's youth ministry, but the sheer quantity of data coming in from around the parish would have been overwhelming to interpret and compare to the responses at the end of the project.

The offices that make up the church council at any of the parish's congregations include deacons<sup>1</sup>, trustees<sup>2</sup>, a treasurer<sup>3</sup>, and a secretary<sup>4</sup>. These positions are elected every year by members during the annual meeting in each

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1. These council members focus on spiritual life/well-being within the church.

2. These council members focus on the maintenance of the church property and help manage the finances.

3. Oversees the church's bank accounts and financial records.

4. Keeps the minutes during the church council meeting.

church. Since the church council positions are, by nature, representative of the whole congregation, it was appropriate to limit the scope of the research project to the council members from each congregation.

A physical copy of the questionnaire was given to each council member in order to help incentivize participation. While almost unquestionably inefficient compared to digital resources available for collecting data, this was done for several reasons. The first and primary reason is due to a potential lack of consistent access to technology on the part of council members. Second, council members may not be technologically literate, potentially making them less inclined to participate. Finally, as a few council members anecdotally commented, it is easier to forget about an electronic invitation to participate in a questionnaire than it is to ignore a physical copy placed in a visible location.

The anonymity of each council member's responses to the questionnaire was guaranteed and was accomplished by assigning numbers to each response. These numbers were filed and saved on a document which was kept in a password-protected computer and an external hard drive. The physical responses to the questionnaire were kept in a fire-proof safe within the parish's offices at Zion/Sarpsborg Free Lutheran. Participants were instructed to answer the questionnaire as it pertained to their specific church. Occasionally, a question would be asked a second time, clearly indicating that the participant ought to answer the question as it concerned the parish.

The project began on February 1, 2019, and concluded on April 30, 2019. These dates were intentionally selected to better intersect with a busier time of

year in the parish's youth ministry as well as to better gauge the effectiveness of the specific steps taken between the initial and follow-up questionnaire over a more substantial period. The timeline of the project could have been longer but not without running into the complication of council members being replaced at the end of their elected term. There is also an increase in potential absences from council members during the summer months. Additionally, students/young families are more prone to be absent for a variety of reasons, including scarcity due to farming, vacation trips, and summer activities.

### **Component 2: Culture Workshops**

There had been some interest expressed in holding a seminar or training session regarding a specific cultural topic, trend, or pattern which predated the research project. Utilizing potential interest in such an event, "Culture Workshops" became a natural extension of this research project. While the participants of the initial questionnaire were strongly encouraged to attend, they were open to the general public. The overall objectives of these workshops were as follows:

- To provide older generations with information regarding specific cultural topics.
- To moderate informed conversations regarding cultural issues and to encourage ongoing discussion.
- To provide parents with resources to better know how to talk to their children about the subjects presented in a meaningful and loving manner.

The topics selected for the Culture Workshops were chosen via an informal survey given to each congregation as an insert in the worship bulletin over two weeks. The brief survey began by asking people to identify which age group they were in, providing four options, 1) Student (ages 0–18); 2) Young Adult (ages 19–25), and 3) Adult (ages 26+). Students and young adults were then provided up to three spaces to answer the next question, “What is an area of culture that you wish parents/adults understood?” Adults were also provided with three spaces to answer at least one of the following questions, “What is an area of culture that concerns you? – or – What is an area of culture you wish you knew more about?” The responses were collected throughout the two weeks. Based on the repetition/overlap in responses, topics for five Culture Workshops were selected. The topics include Technology, Hurt, Focus, Religion, and Sex.

Each of the workshops was designed to fulfill the objectives previously mentioned. There is an abundance of resources, studies, articles, blog posts, and books regarding each of the subjects to the extent where it was becoming difficult to refine the topics down into a manageable presentation that still left time for discussion. The workshops were interspersed on Sunday nights throughout the three months of this project. Sunday night was ideal based on the cultural context of the area for two reasons. First, there are no extra-curricular activities scheduled by the surrounding schools for Sunday night. Second, the parish’s midweek ministries during the Lenten season change to accommodate an additional worship service on Wednesday nights. Given these reasons, the councils at all

three churches believed that Sunday nights would be the best time to hold the workshops.

### **Component 3: Establishing and Encouraging Intentional Intergenerational Relationships**

Since the congregations within the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish typically have fewer than 100 people participate in the worship service on any given Sunday, there were several intergenerational relationships already established. These relationships ranged anywhere from people knowing each other's names to knowing a few interests or hobbies. There were two main objectives behind this piece of the project:

1. To help encourage adults to connect with the younger members more intentionally than had been done.
2. To encourage relationships to take place between non-family members.

Having adults and students learn and remember each other's names was a good first step for this portion of the project. Church council members were encouraged to get to know the younger members of their church.

As mentioned before, many adults within the parish already knew the students who were members of their church. Some had taught them in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School while others lived down the road from each other. Others enjoyed going to local community events (including activities at their local high school) and had seen students and families there. Many adults had not considered that they had been indirectly strengthening the community within

their congregation. It took very little to convince them to not only continue what they had been doing but to also view their efforts as a means of relating to younger generations by meeting them where they lived, worked, and played outside the walls of the church building. The effectiveness of this ministry practice remains unmeasurable at this point since meaningful relationships are not formed overnight—or even in three months for that matter. A few council members said that they saw the value in such activity, emphasizing a desire to continue to get to know their fellow members outside of the weekly worship service.

#### **Component 4: Establishing Student Leaders**

The council members of the parish were not directly involved with this portion of the research project. Instead, this part fell to the team of youth advisors for the parish. As of writing this project, the Youth Advisor Team is composed of both college-age students and parents of students who participate in the youth ministry of the parish. This team would establish a Student Leadership Team in order to potentially benefit the ministry. The first objective is to allow students to represent their peers in the discussion and scheduling of future ministry opportunities, such as outings, retreats, camps, fundraisers, and service projects. The second objective is to allow students to take ownership of a ministry within the church. This objective would allow students to practice and develop leadership skills in a relatively safe and small setting. The team of adult youth advisors recommended students from each of the three congregations and, after accepting the position, a Student Leadership Team was formed.

During the timeline of this project, the team of student leaders met twice. During the first meeting, the Student Leadership Team discussed the possibility of a mission trip for the youth group. Everyone was allowed a chance to vocalize what they thought were strengths, benefits, drawbacks, and weaknesses of such an opportunity. They discussed the topic for over an hour. Highlights of the meeting included deciding if such a trip was in the best interest for the group, what a mission trip might prevent our youth group from taking part in, where the location of the trip might be, the pros and cons of taking students across an ocean for the group's first mission trip, consideration of what such a trip might cost, and what might be expected of them while they were on the trip.

The second meeting of the Student Leadership Team was held in conjunction with the Youth Advisor Team. The students shared the highlights of their first meeting and what they felt the group should do concerning the potential mission trip. Through a discussion with the adults, the decision was reached that the group would plan a mission trip to Minneapolis in the summer of 2020. Such a trip would allow for multiple ministry opportunities in parachurch organizations, a chance to experience diversity in ethnic neighborhoods, would be a cost-effective option, and would allow the group to attend the Free Lutheran Youth Convention in Estes Park, Colorado, the following summer.

### **Component 5: The Follow-Up Questionnaire**

In order to study the effectiveness of this project over three months, the follow-up questionnaire was almost identical to its predecessor to be able to compare, contrast, and measure the responses from participants. The only

difference was the inclusion of four short answer questions at the end of the questionnaire:

1. Over the past three months, I believe our church has been strengthened in the following areas (please provide two to three short answers).
2. Through the course of this research project (including Culture Workshops), I've become aware of needs in our church and/or Parish where we need to grow/develop (please provide two to three short answers).
3. Based on the topics covered in this research project, I have personally been challenged in the following areas (please provide two to three short answers).
4. Specifically pertaining to youth and family ministry, I believe our Parish can grow in the following areas (please provide one to two short answers).

There were also clear directions for participants who did not desire to answer these questions to respond with "No comment." These questions were added to the follow-up questionnaire to minimize a potential weakness of this project caused by the proposed timeline. It is entirely possible for the final results of this study to show either growth or deterioration within the parish's youth ministry due to the participants forgetting how they responded in the first questionnaire. Based on the responses given to these questions, they proved to be effective in reducing this potential issue. They also served as an outlet for participants to share valuable input regarding their growth through the project.



## CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

### **Initial Setbacks and Solutions**

A total of twenty-one participants returned the first questionnaire at the beginning of the research project—seven council members per church responded. The second questionnaire did not have the same response rate, with a total of twelve final participants. Where they pertain to the assessment of the current health and effectiveness of the youth ministry within the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish, all responses from the initial questionnaire will be taken into consideration. But in order to accurately measure the effectiveness of this research project, the initial contributions of the nine council members who did not participate in the second questionnaire were disregarded. Doing so will allow more accurate conclusions to be drawn by preventing their responses from skewing the initial baseline. In the end, there was enough representation from each congregation to allow for an accurate evaluation of this project throughout the parish.

### **Results**

The results of this research project indicated both growth and decline. There were a total of twelve specific questions which saw at least some degree of growth in all three congregations over the three months. It is worth pointing out that three of these questions pertained to student leadership within the parish:<sup>1</sup>

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1. Participants were asked to answer the questions on a scale from 1 (“We’re really struggling in this area”) to 5 (“We’re doing really well”).

Table 1: Results from question 6: Our church entrusts and empowers adolescents and young adults with leadership opportunities.

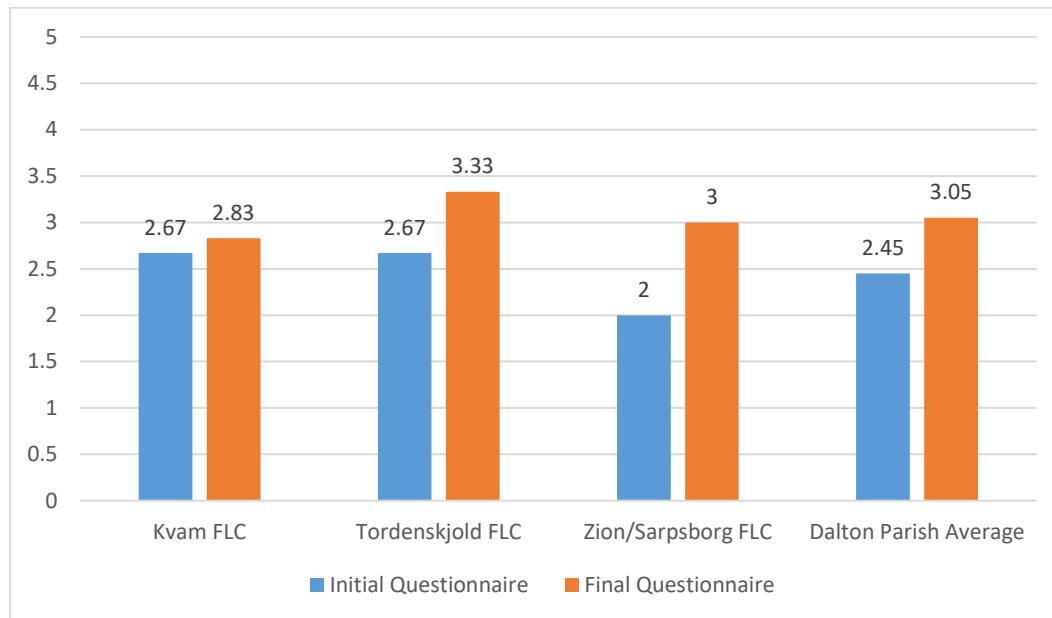


Table 2: Results from question 7: Our church appropriately values both young and mature leadership.

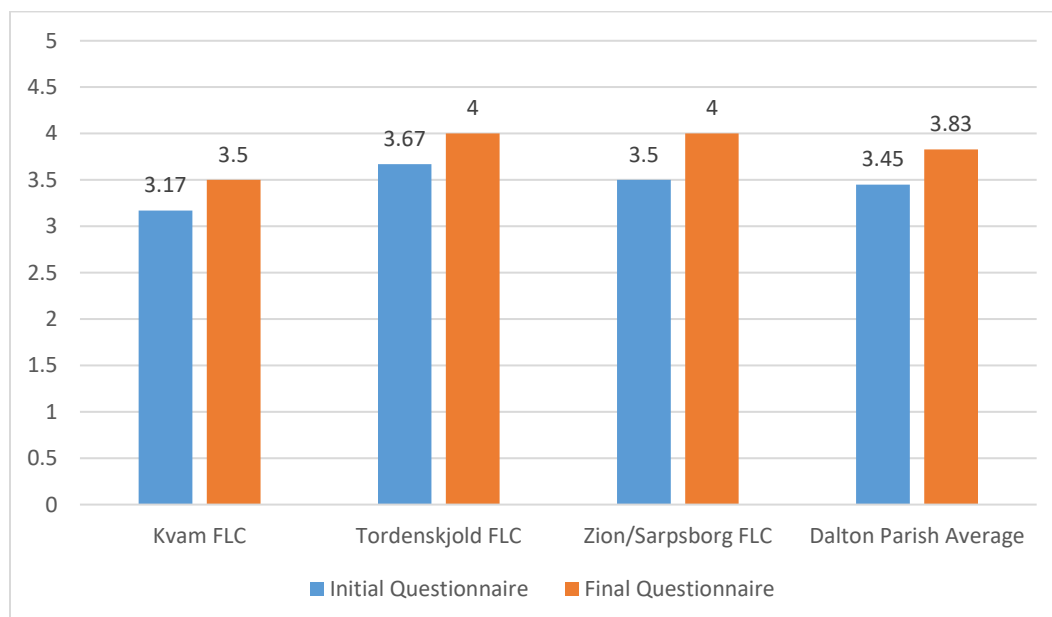
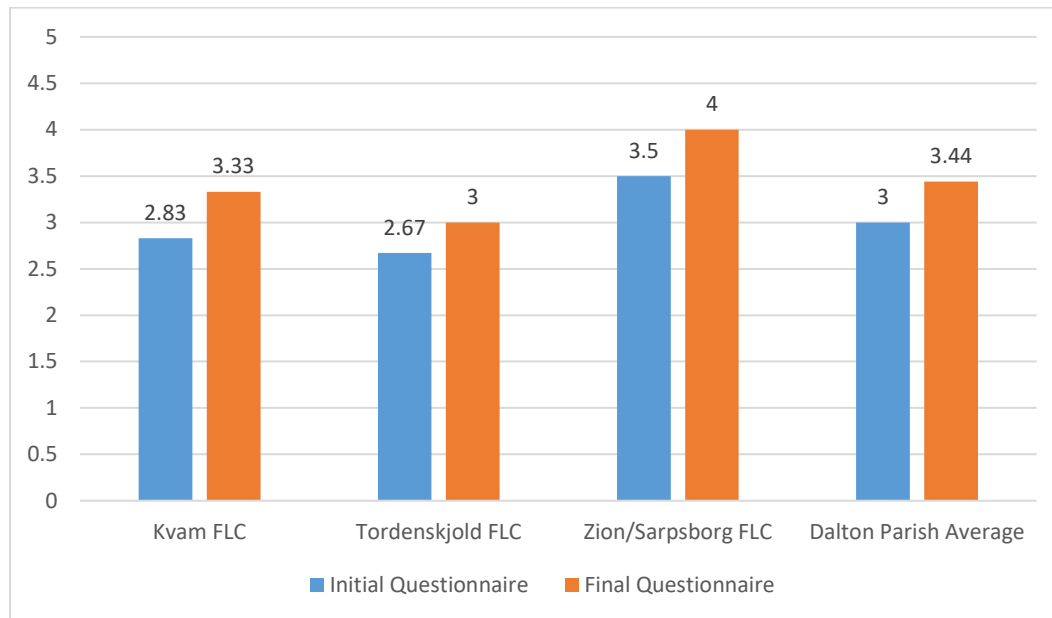


Table 3: Results from question 8: Our church recognizes adolescents gifted with leadership and equips them to pursue their gifts.



The remaining areas which indicated growth are as follows:

Table 4: Results from question 12: Our church recognizes and addresses important issues that adolescents/young adults face in today's culture."

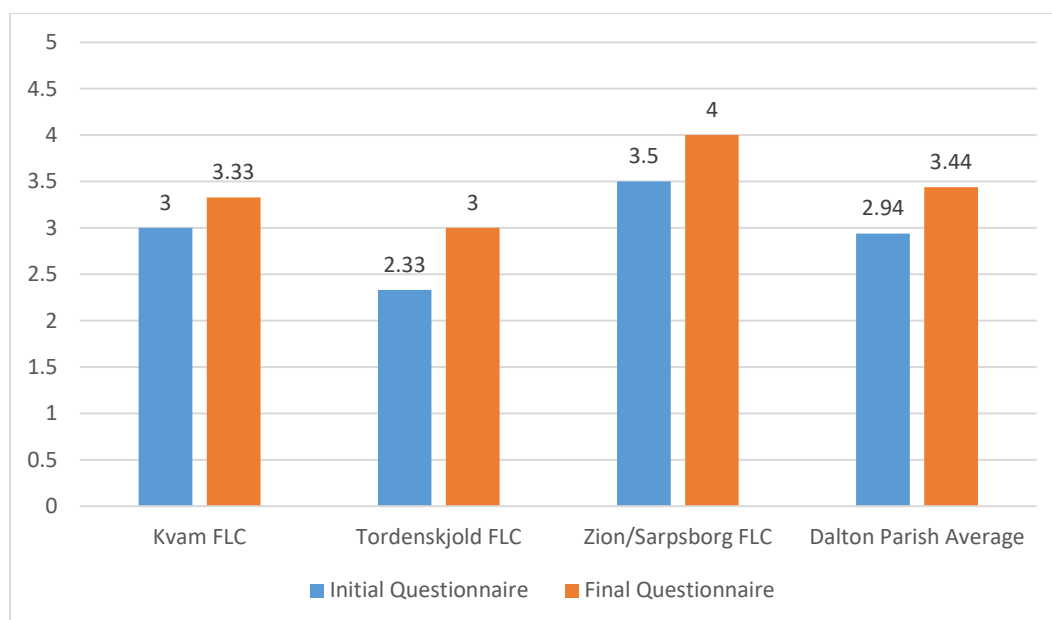


Table 5: Results from question 27: When confronting people about sin in their lives, we do so out of love and concern instead of contempt.”

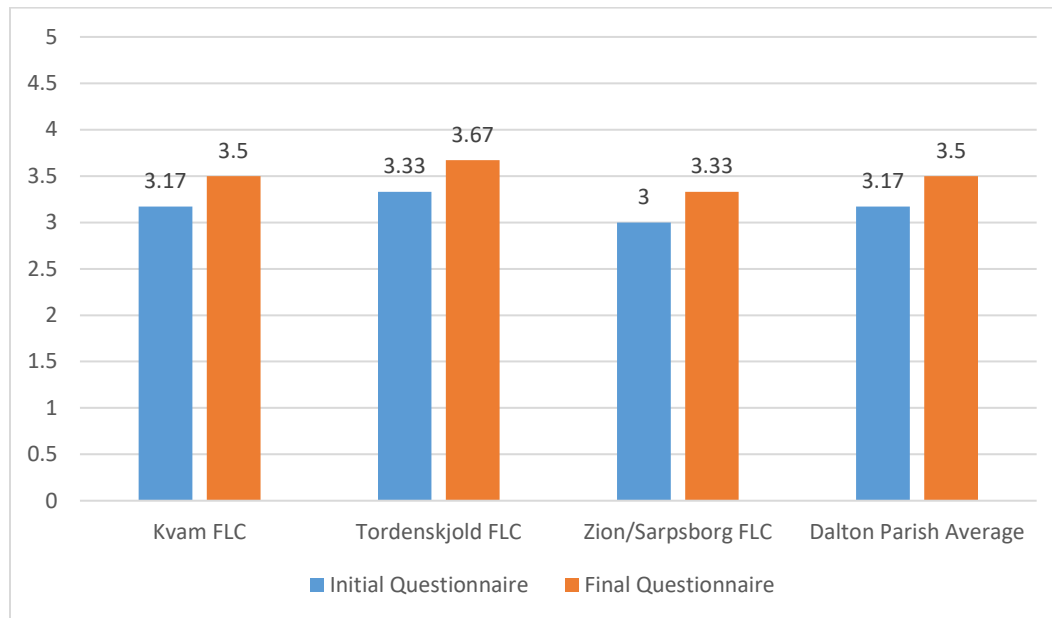


Table 6: Results from question 28: Younger generations that attend our church are challenged to put their faith into action rather than hearing what behaviors they ought to avoid.

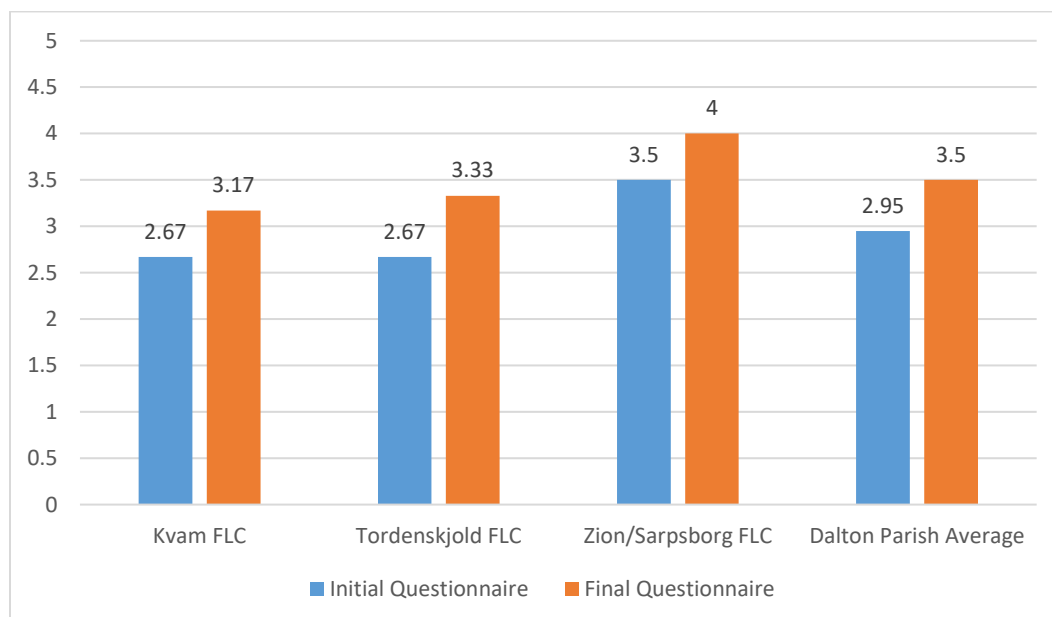


Table 7: Results from question 39: Our church prioritizes young people.

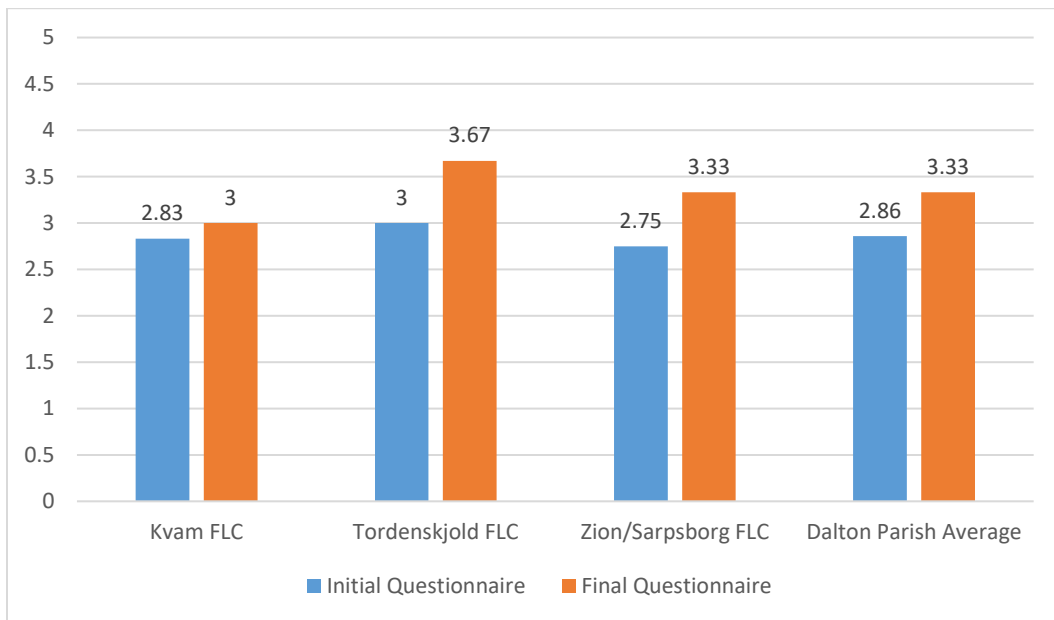


Table 8: results from question 41: Our church seeks ways to help parents fulfill their role as the primary disciple-maker of their children.

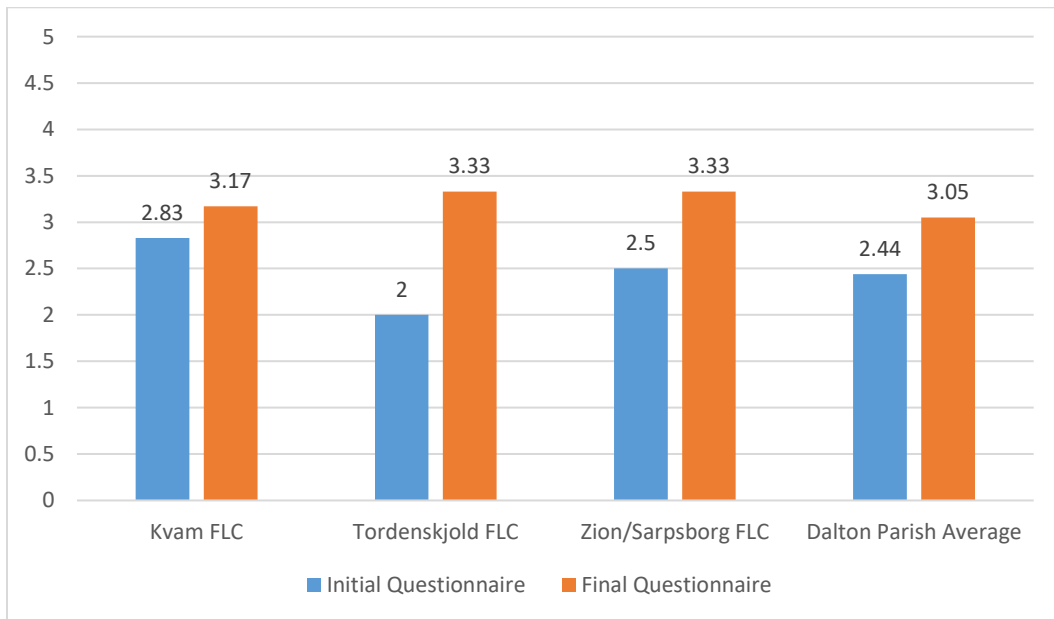


Table 9: Results from question 42: Our Parish seeks ways to help parents fulfill their role as the primary disciple-makers of their children.

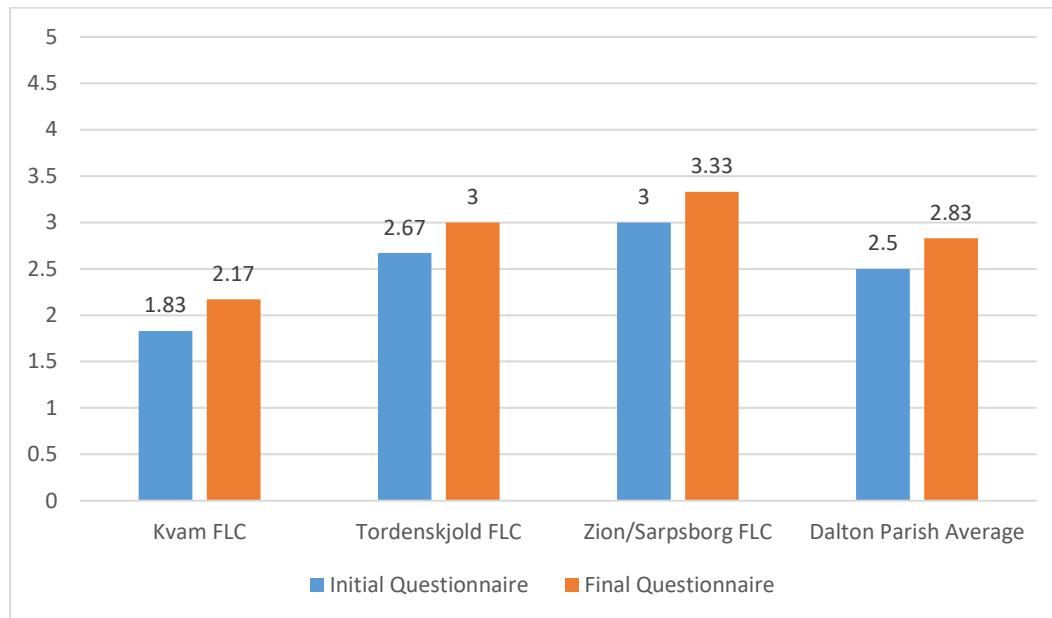


Table 10: Results from question 48: Our church utilizes technology effectively to better reach out/appeal to younger generations.

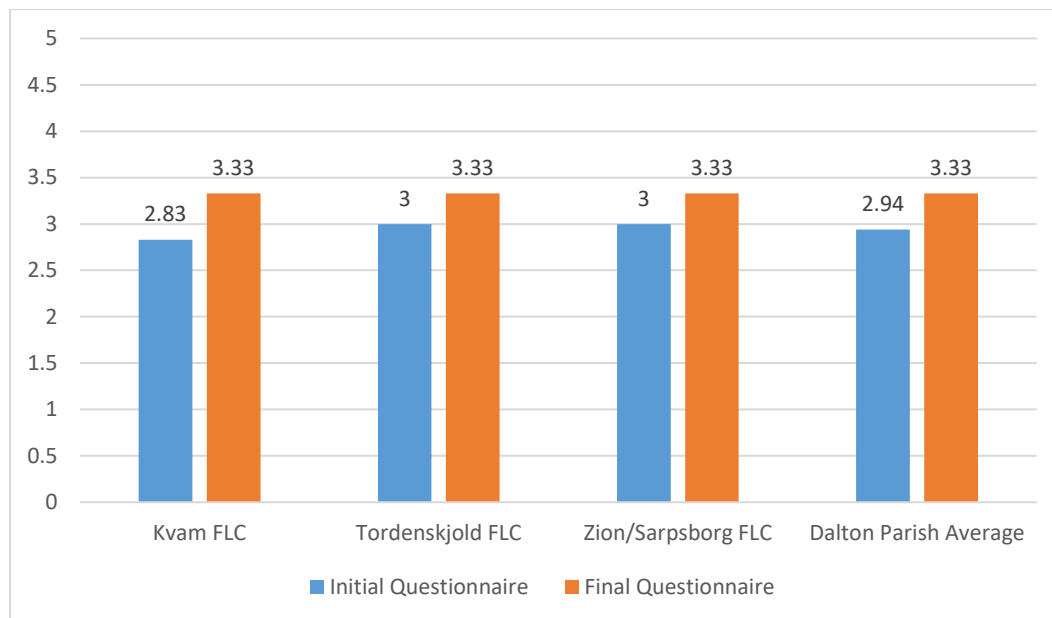


Table 11: Results from question 49: Our Parish utilizes technology effectively to better reach out/appeal to younger generations.

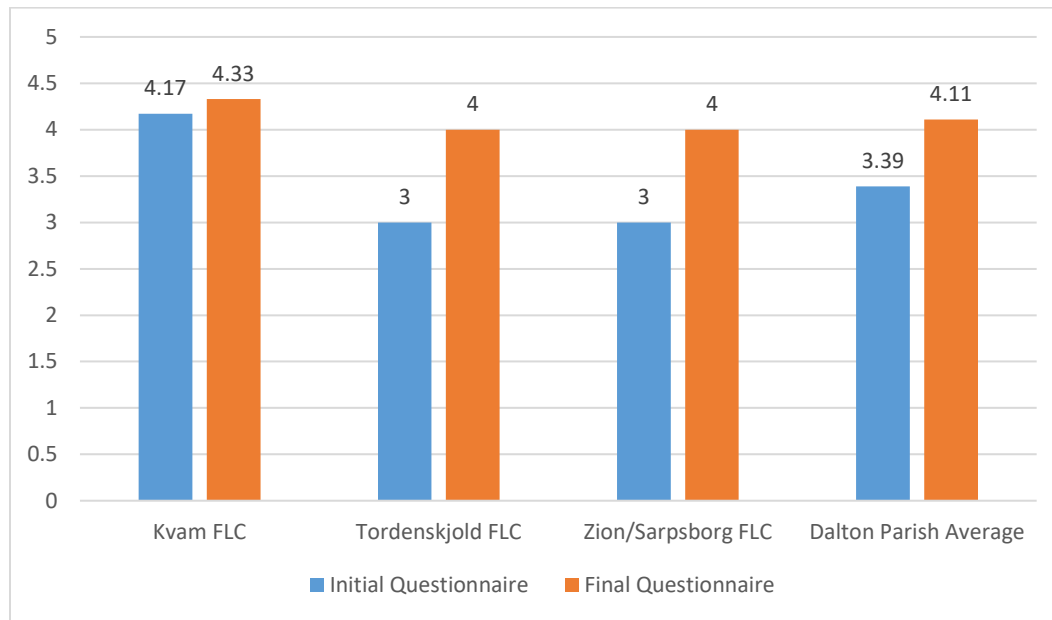
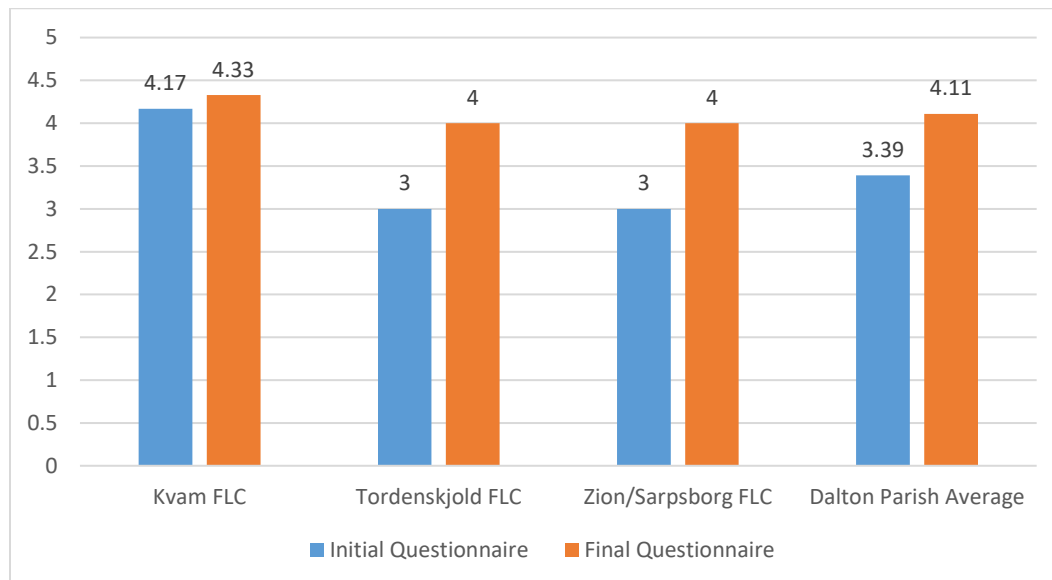
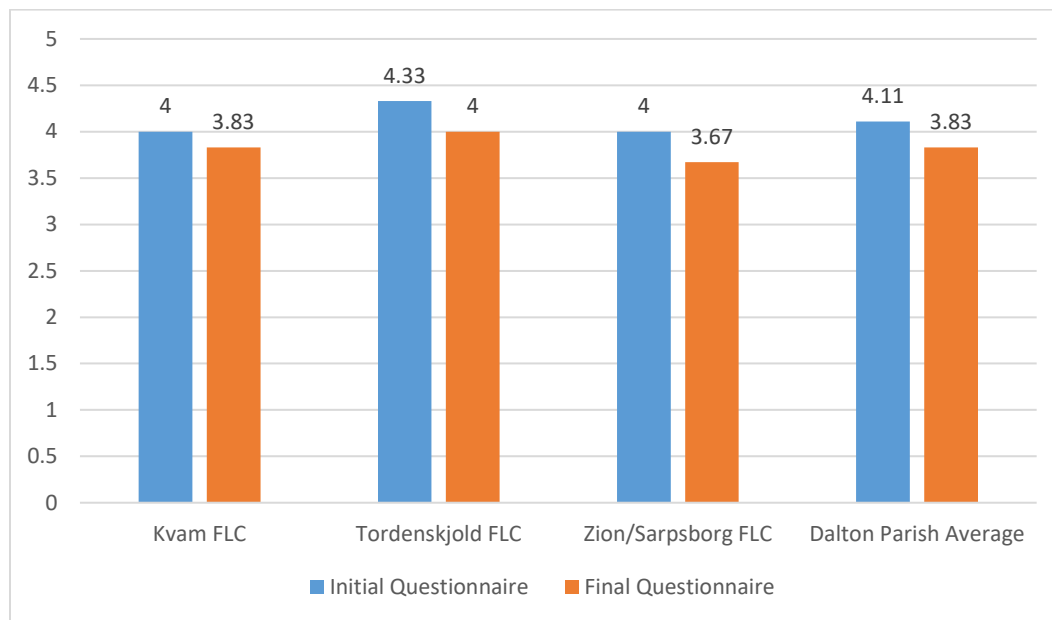


Table 12: Results from question 53: Our Parish is willing to partner with other churches and Christian organizations when it comes to ministering to younger generations.



There was only one area which saw deterioration across all three congregations.

Table 13: Results from question 22: The people in our church understand and can clearly state what the Gospel is.



### Interpretation

The abundance of areas which indicate growth from the final questionnaire is very encouraging as it pertains to the overall effectiveness of the components of this research project. Additional encouragement was drawn from the fact that there were multiple areas which saw growth within individual congregations. However, because this project focused on responses from the parish as a whole, the questions which saw growth or decline across all three congregations within the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish will be subject to more significant interpretation.

The first and foremost focus of analysis and interpretation are questions about student leaders. The data collected from Question 7 suggests that the parish already valued leadership skills and abilities from both young and old members. It



is difficult not to see the correlation between the establishment of a Student Leadership Team and the positive responses given in the follow-up questionnaire. Based solely on the discussion that was held in the first two meetings, there truly seems to be an acknowledgment of leadership potential in the students of the parish. Having seen preliminary success from this component of the research project, the Student Leadership Team will remain a part of the overall leadership within the parish.

Other areas related to one another which saw growth were questions 41 and 42<sup>2</sup> as well as questions 48 and 49.<sup>3</sup> While there are no components directly tied to these responses, they both warrant a brief analysis. It is encouraging to see an increased desire across the parish to help parents in their efforts to teach their children about their faith. It is also encouraging to see rural congregations willing to utilize technology to better appeal to younger generations. A strong assessment in both areas provided by the initial questionnaire suggests that this desire predates this research project.

While there was one question relating to the Culture Workshops which saw growth across the parish,<sup>4</sup> there were many comments in the questionnaires which indicated the effectiveness of this component over three months. These comments came through the short answer questions provided in the second

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2. Regarding the church and the parish's pursuit of helping parents fulfill their role as the primary disciple-makers of their children.

3. Regarding the utilization of technology in the worship service by individual churches and the parish to better reach out/appeal to younger generations.

4. Question 12: Our church recognizes and addresses important issues that adolescents/young adults face in today's culture.

questionnaire. To state again: the short answer questions in the second questionnaire helped eliminate the potential for “false growth” due to forgetfulness on the part of participants.

One participant commented regarding an area where they believed the parish needed to grow, stating the need to continue “reading and listening to resources that offer Biblical information regarding struggles youth face.” This same participant suggested that the workshops continue for the foreseeable future, recognizing several potential topics which may be effectively covered in this format. Another participant stated, “I believe our church has received an increased awareness of the issues facing our youth culture. I see an increased desire to learn more. I think those who attended the Workshops appreciated the in-depth study and real application.” Several other members of the parish indicated their appreciation that they belonged to a church body that was willing to have conversations about difficult topics. Based on the feedback and results of the study, the Culture Workshops will become a consistent ministry within the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish, taking input from the laity regarding the selection of future topics.

Finally, there were responses to questions which speak to the effectiveness of this project in regard to discipleship, mentorship, and intergenerational relationships. Among participants, there was a sense of parents being given more opportunities and resources to fulfill their God-given role of being the disciplinarians of their children both on the congregational and parish-wide level. This response may be a result of holding Culture Workshops and more direct

encouragement for adults to build relationships with students. There may be some growth in this area due to participants becoming more aware of resources which were available to the parish before the beginning of this project, such as the Parent Page Newsletter from CPYU. Additionally, the responses to Question 53 shed light on the willingness of the parish to work with other congregations or para-church organizations (such as Young Life and Youth for Christ) in order to better minister to younger generations. This willingness displays three attitudes within the parish. The first is an understanding of the importance of ministering to younger generations. The second is an acknowledgment concerning the lack of resources available to the parish as they find themselves in rural settings. Third is a willingness to partner with others in order to accomplish tasks otherwise impossible to them individually.

It is worth addressing the area of this project which saw deterioration across the parish: the overall response to question 22 regarding people's understanding and ability to clearly state what the gospel is. Speaking generally, the result from this question ought to be a point of crucial concern for any church. It would be ideal to see a relatively high response in this area on the initial survey—not to mention some degree of growth in the follow-up questionnaire! But the average answers from participants still suggest that people's understanding and ability to communicate the gospel was high enough to not warrant an aggressive response or correction from the pastoral/spiritual leadership in the parish. It may be more appropriately addressed through clear communication from the pastors during the worship service and partnering with

deacons and other leadership within the parish to clearly define and proclaim the gospel at all times.

### **Conclusion**

There is little to suggest that this research project was not successful within the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish. From its onset, this project sought to answer two questions: what might it look like for churches to assess the current health of their ministry? Moreover, once the initial assessment has been completed, what steps might they take to improve or pursue healthy ministry as defined by Scripture rather than the definition of success provided by modern-day society? Through the implementation of a second questionnaire, the effects of the steps taken to pursue a healthy ministry were able to be measured. Based on the responses from the council members of the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish, these steps proved successful over three months.

Both of these questions help to answer the overarching question of this thesis project: How might a rural congregation seek to strengthen its youth ministry? It stands to reason that a congregation's efforts to minister to younger generations would look different from the church down the road, and that is perfectly fine. It would be rather dull if youth ministries were identical in every church in the United States. The components involved in this research project proved useful within the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish, but that does not mean that they would necessarily be as effective in another setting. At least, not without some modifications to help compensate for a different ministry context.

In a way, youth ministry within a congregation is unique in that it allows the opportunity to be innovative concerning the application of biblical principles of discipleship, mentorship, and the importance of Christian community toward a specific age group. Perhaps youth ministries will attempt to refine or edit their current ministries to become more efficient in speaking God's truth into postmodern culture. Perhaps they may realize that their church is not as "bad off" or as "far behind" as they had initially thought. The unique characteristic of innovation is that it tends to inspire further innovation and engineering from others.

Some may be troubled at the existence of youth ministry within a church due to the lack of direct Scriptural prescription. While this attitude seeks to jettison faulty practices from the life of the church, it is perhaps not as helpful as its proponents may believe. The world has changed and Root proposes that youth ministry can be theological. He also emphasizes the need to "expose not only our intentions but also our motives to the light of theological reflection."<sup>5</sup> This allows congregations a fair amount of flexibility regarding how their ministry to emerging generations takes place. Rather than questioning the scriptural validity of youth ministry, they should carefully examine whether or not they are faithful to Scripture when it comes to making disciples.

Even with careful consideration and intentional design of this project, it was challenging to quantify the growth and development of relationships that

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5. Root, *Taking Theology*, 32.

were formed between people in different generations. Perhaps it was to be expected; there is no real way to quantify or measure relational bonds apart from subjective, anecdotal reporting. This is not to say that relationships were not formed or strengthened, just that there was no indication of significant changes during the three months of the research project. This will also likely be an area in which the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish continues to develop and grow.

### **What Now?**

#### **Within the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish**

As was noted previously, the components that took place throughout this research project proved useful to varying degrees. It is fair to anticipate that the parish would desire the continuation of said components, allowing some liberty to alter various elements to better fit their ministry context.

An area of this project which received a fair amount of vocal approval was the Culture Workshops. There has already been an expressed sentiment of holding a workshop consistently for the foreseeable future, expanding to involve other area churches and parents throughout the community. While the workshops covered broad topics during the research project, there is a desire for the topics to be more focused. For instance, rather than broadly talking about technology, it would be beneficial to address the trends, impact, and over-use of social media.

In addition to Culture Workshops, there is a strong approval from both the Adult Youth Advisory Team and the councils from the parish regarding the Student Leadership Team. Allowing adolescents to develop leadership skills

while taking ownership of the ministry they are a part of has proven to be a positive step, even though it is still in its infancy. This will be a ministry that will continue to be developed and refined in the months to come.

### Beyond the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish

The Dalton Free Lutheran Parish consists of three congregations within the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC). Based mainly in the Midwest of the United States, the AFLC is currently composed of 255 congregations. One hundred and thirty-four Free Lutheran congregations are located in the rural setting<sup>6</sup>—an astonishing 52.6 percent(!). Eighty-seven congregations are located in suburban areas<sup>7</sup> (34.1 percent), and 34 congregations are situated in urban areas<sup>8</sup> (13.3 percent). Even when broadening the definition of the rural setting to include populations of 10,000 or fewer, only ten congregations were moved from the “suburban” to the “rural” setting. Suffice it to say: a significant number of Free Lutheran congregations are located in the rural setting.

Considering this data, it would be worth offering the findings and components of this thesis project to other Free Lutheran congregations—especially those in the rural setting. The challenge in doing so comes from the congregational polity adhered to by the AFLC. Congregational polity allows churches the autonomy and authority to accept or decline any assistance in regard

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6. A population of 2,500 or less.

7. A population ranging from 2,500–49,999.

8. A population of 50,000 or higher.

to how their church operates. Offering the findings of this thesis as a potential resource to consider is better than not having a resource to call upon in the first place. To best disperse the findings to congregations, support and assistance from the national director of youth ministries and the president of the AFLC will be valuable.

Youth ministry has evolved in appearance and its methods over the history of the church, and it will undoubtedly continue to do so until the second coming of Jesus. Despite the days which bring difficulties, hardships, challenges, stress, and frustration, Psalm 78:1–4 provides a clear picture of why so many willingly face the storm of ministry to adolescents: it is so the next generation may know of the LORD's love and faithfulness to His people:

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.



## APPENDIX A: PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE

### **Instructions**

This questionnaire is being given to the council members of the churches that make up the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish. Please answer these questions as they pertain to the church of which you are a member (Kvam, Tordenskjold, or Zion/Sarpsborg). Questions pertaining to the ministry of the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish as a whole will be clearly noted. Note: the term “adolescents” is used to refer to children between 10 and 24 years of age<sup>1</sup>. Please answer the following questions as truthfully as possible. This questionnaire should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. Once done, please return to Pastor Dan Hurner. Thank you!

### **Introduction**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**I belong to/am a member of:** *(circle one)*

Kvam

Tordenskjold

Zion/Sarpsborg

*Please circle one answer per question.*

1. Young people are important to the life of our church.

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

2. Young families and adolescents bring life and energy to our congregation.

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

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1. World Health Organization, World Bank Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP) Guidelines for research on reproductive health involving adolescents From the Programme’s document Preparing a Project Proposal, Guidelines and Forms (Third Edition)  
<[www.who.int/reproductivehealth/hrp/guidelines\\_adolescent.en.html](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/hrp/guidelines_adolescent.en.html)> (version current at September 8, 2003).

3. Our church has a strong desire to see younger generations come to saving faith in Jesus.

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

4. Our church has a strong desire to see younger generations grow in their relationship with Jesus.

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

5. Which best describes how you perceive adolescents? (*circle one*)

Large and clumsy children

Young and immature adults

*Answer the following personal statements using the following scale:*

*1 – We’re really struggling in this area!*

*2 – We could use some help*

*3 – Neutral*

*4 – We’re doing okay in this area*

*5 – We’re doing really well!*

6. Our church entrusts and empowers adolescents and young adults with leadership opportunities.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

7. Our church appropriately values both young and mature leadership.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

8. Our church recognizes adolescents gifted with leadership and equips them to pursue their gifts.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

9. The leadership at our church balances the truth of Scripture and a desire to be “relevant” well.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

10. The leadership in our congregation acts with the future in mind instead of taking shortsighted steps.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

11. Our church allows failures from adolescents to help shape them to be better leaders in the future.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

12. Our church recognizes and addresses important issues that adolescents/young adults face in today's culture.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

13. Our church empathizes with adolescents/young adults as they wrestle with (or search for) their identity (answering the question, "Who am I?").

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

14. The youth, young adults, and young families in our church care about their faith.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

15. Our church helps adolescents/young adults know how to meaningfully express their faith.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

16. Our church is aware of the demographics of people in our community (race/ethnicity, gender, average age, etc.)

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

17. Our church leadership recognizes and is sensitive to other commitments and activities in which other members are involved.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

18. The people at our church consistently attend community events in which other church members are involved.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

19. Our church members seek to build meaningful relationships that cross generational gaps.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

20. I have a healthy relationship with one (or more) of the students in our church.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

21. I regularly attempt to better understand the issues/problems/struggles that adolescents/young adults face in the world today.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

22. People in our church understand and can clearly state what the Gospel is.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

23. In 1-2 sentences, what is the Gospel?

24. People in our church feel comfortable asking questions and/or discussing parts of their faith that they find confusing or difficult to understand.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

25. As a Parish, all of our members are equipped to share their faith with their neighbors (friends, family, co-workers, classmates, etc.)

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

26. As a church, we actively look for ways to make and strengthen disciples.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

27. When confronting people about sin in their lives, we do so out of love and concern instead of contempt.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

28. Younger generations that attend our church are challenged to put their faith into action rather than hearing what behaviors they ought to avoid.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

29. Younger generations in our church are given opportunities to be challenged to grow in their faith.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

30. Our church is passionate about evangelism (sharing your faith with others).

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

31. Our Parish is passionate about evangelism (sharing your faith with others).

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

32. When people visit our church, they feel warmly welcomed.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

33. We strive toward building a stronger sense of community within our church fellowship.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

34. People feel included rather than excluded from the community of our church.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

35. Our church finds value in doing things that include all generations.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

36. The members of our church desire to have honest friendships where struggles and challenges of daily life can be shared.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

37. The members of our church desire to have honest friendships with members of other churches in our Parish where struggles and challenges of daily life can be shared.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

38. The members of our church are willing to sacrifice anything in order to win younger generations to Jesus Christ.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

39. Our church prioritizes young people.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

40. Our Parish prioritizes young people.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

41. Our church seeks ways to help parents fulfill their role as the primary disciplinarians of their children.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

42. Our Parish seeks ways to help parents fulfill their role as the primary disciplinarians of their children.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

43. Parents and/or caregivers feel supported by our church.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

44. We are sensitive to the needs of the families that are in our community.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

45. Our passion and desire to reach younger generations is reflected in the amount of resources we designate towards those types of ministry opportunities as a church.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

46. Our passion and desire to reach younger generations is reflected in the amount of resources we designate towards those types of ministry opportunities as a Parish.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

47. Our church desires young people to be a part in every aspect of our ministry.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

48. Our church utilizes technology effectively to better reach out/appeal to younger generations.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

49. Our Parish utilizes technology effectively to better reach out/appeal to younger generations

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

50. People in our church are active in our community outside of church activities.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

51. The members of our church are willing to have conversations with adolescents about difficult topics.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

52. Our church is willing to partner with other churches and Christian organizations when it comes to ministering to younger generations.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

53. Our Parish is willing to partner with other churches and Christian organizations when it comes to ministering to younger generations.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

54. In the area of youth ministry, I believe our church is doing \_\_\_\_\_ effectively (please provide two to three short answers).

55. In the area of youth ministry, I believe our church could be better at \_\_\_\_\_ (please provide two to three short answers).

56. How long have you been a member at your congregation (in years)?

\_\_\_\_\_

57. What is your age range? (please circle one).

18-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

60-69

70+



## APPENDIX B: FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

### **Instructions**

This questionnaire is being given to the council members of the churches that make up the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish. Please answer these questions as they pertain to the church of which you are a member (Kvam, Tordenskjold, or Zion/Sarpsborg). Questions pertaining to the ministry of the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish as a whole will be clearly noted. Note: the term “adolescents” is used to refer to children between 10 and 24 years of age<sup>1</sup>. Please answer the following questions as truthfully as possible, specifically concerning the duration of this research project (the past three months). This questionnaire should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. Once done, please return to Pastor Dan Hurner. Thank you!

### **Introduction**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**I belong to/am a member of:** (*circle one*)

Kvam

Tordenskjold

Zion/Sarpsborg

*Please circle one answer per question.*

1. Young people are important to the life of our church.

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

2. Young families and adolescents bring life and energy to our congregation.

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

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1. World Health Organization, World Bank Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP) Guidelines for research on reproductive health involving adolescents From the Programme’s document Preparing a Project Proposal, Guidelines and Forms (Third Edition)  
<[www.who.int/reproductivehealth/hrp/guidelines\\_adolescent.en.html](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/hrp/guidelines_adolescent.en.html)> (Version current at September 8, 2003).

3. Our church has a strong desire to see younger generations come to saving faith in Jesus.

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

4. Our church has a strong desire to see younger generations grow in their relationship with Jesus.

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

5. Which best describes how you perceive adolescents? (*circle one*)

Large and clumsy children

Young and immature adults

*Answer the following personal statements using the following scale:*

*1 – We’re really struggling in this area!*

*2 – We could use some help*

*3 – Neutral*

*4 – We’re doing okay in this area*

*5 – We’re doing really well!*

6. Our church entrusts and empowers adolescents and young adults with leadership opportunities.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

7. Our church appropriately values both young and mature leadership.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

8. Our church recognizes adolescents gifted with leadership and equips them to pursue their gifts.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

9. The leadership at our church balances the truth of Scripture and a desire to be “relevant” well.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

10. The leadership in our congregation acts with the future in mind instead of taking shortsighted steps.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

11. Our church allows failures from adolescents to help shape them to be better leaders in the future.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

12. Our church recognizes and addresses important issues that adolescents/young adults face in today's culture.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

13. Our church empathizes with adolescents/young adults as they wrestle with (or search for) their identity (answering the question, "Who am I?").

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

14. The youth, young adults, and young families in our church care about their faith.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

15. Our church helps adolescents/young adults know how to meaningfully express their faith.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

16. Our church is aware of the demographics of people in our community (race/ethnicity, gender, average age, etc.)

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

17. Our church leadership recognizes and is sensitive to other commitments and activities in which other members are involved.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

18. The people at our church consistently attend community events in which other church members are involved.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

19. Our church members seek to build meaningful relationships that cross generational gaps.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

20. I have a healthy relationship with one (or more) of the students in our church.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

21. I regularly attempt to better understand the issues/problems/struggles that adolescents/young adults face in the world today.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

22. People in our church understand and can clearly state what the Gospel is.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

23. In 1-2 sentences, what is the Gospel?

24. People in our church feel comfortable asking questions and/or discussing parts of their faith that they find confusing or difficult to understand.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

25. As a Parish, all of our members are equipped to share their faith with their neighbors (friends, family, co-workers, classmates, etc.)

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

26. As a church, we actively look for ways to make and strengthen disciples.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

27. When confronting people about sin in their lives, we do so out of love and concern instead of contempt.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

28. Younger generations that attend our church are challenged to put their faith into action rather than hearing what behaviors they ought to avoid.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

29. Younger generations in our church are given opportunities to be challenged to grow in their faith.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

30. Our church is passionate about evangelism (sharing your faith with others).

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

31. Our Parish is passionate about evangelism (sharing your faith with others).

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

32. When people visit our church, they feel warmly welcomed.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

33. We strive toward building a stronger sense of community within our church fellowship.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

34. People feel included rather than excluded from the community of our church.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

35. Our church finds value in doing things that include all generations.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

36. The members of our church desire to have honest friendships where struggles and challenges of daily life can be shared.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

37. The members of our church desire to have honest friendships with members of other churches in our Parish where struggles and challenges of daily life can be shared.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

38. The members of our church are willing to sacrifice anything in order to win younger generations to Jesus Christ.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

39. Our church prioritizes young people.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

40. Our Parish prioritizes young people.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

41. Our church seeks ways to help parents fulfill their role as the primary disciple-makers of their children.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

42. Our Parish seeks ways to help parents fulfill their role as the primary disciple-makers of their children.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

43. Parents and/or caregivers feel supported by our church.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

44. We are sensitive to the needs of the families that are in our community.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

45. Our passion and desire to reach younger generations is reflected in the amount of resources we designate towards those types of ministry opportunities as a church.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

46. Our passion and desire to reach younger generations is reflected in the amount of resources we designate towards those types of ministry opportunities as a Parish.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

47. Our church desires young people to be a part in every aspect of our ministry.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

48. Our church utilizes technology effectively to better reach out/appeal to younger generations.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

49. Our Parish utilizes technology effectively to better reach out/appeal to younger generations

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

50. People in our church are active in our community outside of church activities.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

51. The members of our church are willing to have conversations with adolescents about difficult topics.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

52. Our church is willing to partner with other churches and Christian organizations when it comes to ministering to younger generations.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

53. Our Parish is willing to partner with other churches and Christian organizations when it comes to ministering to younger generations.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

**Short Answer** – Please briefly fill these answers out to the best of your ability, specifically as they apply to the development and duration of this research project (beginning February 2019). Please answer legibly and in complete sentences. If you wish to not answer a question, please indicate by stating, “No comment.”

54. Over the past three months, I believe our church has been strengthened in the following areas (please provide two to three short answers):

55. Through the course of this research project (including Culture Workshops), I’ve become aware of needs in our church and/or parish where we need to grow/develop (please provide two to three short answers):

56. Based on the topics covered in this research project, I have personally been challenged in the following areas (please provide two to three short answers):

57. Specifically pertaining to youth and family ministry, I believe our Parish can grow in the following areas (please provide one to two short answers):



## APPENDIX C: CULTURE WORKSHOP SYNOPSIS

### **A Culture of Technology**

Considering what the world was like fifty years ago sheds light on how much has changed about our society. In 1969, humanity was leaving footprints on the moon, a parent's arm was a good enough seatbelt for a child in a vehicle, and computers which filled entire rooms had processing power which, by today's standards, is almost laughable. Technology has helped shape the world, but it has done so as a two-edged sword. On one hand, technology allows us to connect with people around the world, to make journeys across continents in mere hours, and has allowed medicinal practices to advance with leaps and bounds.

On the other hand, technology does not come without drawbacks. Identity theft is a constant possibility and owning a device with access to the internet allows a person almost immediate and free access to pornography and other demeaning and abusive possibilities. Owning accounts on social media platforms opens a person up to the possibility of cyberbullying and stalking. But no matter how the pros and cons are weighed, technology is almost unavoidable in today's culture.

What people are hoping to obtain with technology boils down to a sense of status: "If I had *this*, then . . . ." The pursuit of status influences how money is budgeted, impacts what is seen as essential to daily life, and affects how companies advertise their products. The extent to which both adults and adolescents interact with media on average is almost mind-boggling, even though

they interact with it in different ways—adults focusing more on work and communication and adolescents focusing more on social networking and entertainment. The currency in a culture of technology is likes, favorites, retweets, subscribers, and followers. They have no real value and are given out freely and without care, but they are valued and pursued as though it was all that gave life meaning and purpose.

The gospel tie-in to the Culture of Technology is found in an authentic and genuine community within the body of Christ.<sup>1</sup> A true sense of satisfaction and contentment may be found outside an IP address.<sup>2</sup> Having status or a high cultural standing may be a source of pride, and Scripture instructs us to remain humble.<sup>3</sup> Finally, a person's identity and value may be found in the identity given by God to His children.<sup>4</sup> Parents were encouraged to keep track of screen time with other people and to take the opportunity to teach their children about moderation. Parents also ought to have conversations about difficult topics, such as sexting, pornography, and cyberbullying. Safeguards ought to be established to help protect children from harmful content. Finally, parents were encouraged to establish a usage policy for technology within their homes, allowing their children a chance to use technology more healthily.

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1. Acts 4:32–37.

2. Isaiah 55:2.

3. Romans 12:3.

4. Ephesians 1:3–14.

## A Culture of Hurt

The title of this workshop was taken from Chap Clark's book, *Hurt 2.0*. The basic premise is that while adolescents may appear to be okay on the surface, there may be an internal struggle that they are attempting to suppress. Clark identifies this as "the world beneath."<sup>5</sup> The focus of this workshop was on the pursuit of safety in today's culture by younger generations. Where might be the safest place to express one's self or to wrestle with their identity without shame, ridicule, or embarrassment? Students, in general, are the recipients of pressure and expectations from several sources, including teachers, coaches, celebrities, significant others, family, friends, neighbors, employers, the church or other religious groups, and even from themselves. Some of these expectations are realistic, such as studying hard for school or abstaining from drugs or being diligent at their job. Other expectations may not be in the realm of possibility for most adolescents—such as maintaining a 4.0 GPA or getting drafted into a professional sport right out of high school. This workshop also briefly covered the significance of prolonged puberty and how it affects behavior in adolescents; in the words of Allen and Allen, "25 is the new 18."<sup>6</sup> Those who attended the workshop also discussed the psychological state of adolescents as it pertains to their brain development and how they make decisions. As their frontal cortex<sup>7</sup> is

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5. Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

6. Joseph Allen and Claudia Worrell Allen, *Escaping the Endless Adolescence: How We Can Help Our Teenagers Grow Up before They Grow Old* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009).

7. The part of the brain that's responsible for decision making, personality expression, and moderating social behavior.

developing, most of their decisions are made with the amygdala,<sup>8</sup> helping to shed light on why those who volunteer in junior high student ministry deserve a parade and maybe a commemorative statue in the town square.

The gospel tie-in to the Culture of Hurt is that people ought to work hard and to strive for quality in their lives because it honors God. The book of Ecclesiastes serves as a warning to any who would attempt to find satisfaction and contentment apart from God. In Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus invites people to lay their burdens upon Him and receive the rest He freely gives. In Galatians 6:1–10, Paul similarly encourages Christians to bear one another’s burdens—to share with others in their struggles and suffering. Finally, there is a fantastic glimpse into the doctrines of God, man, depravity, and redemption in this topic. God instructs His people to be holy, just as He is.<sup>9</sup> People fail to live up to this expectation every day due to original sin, but in our shortcomings, God gives us His grace and mercy. The encouragement to parents/adults in this workshop is to earn the right to be heard by adolescents and to consistently prove over time their love, support, and willingness to be a refuge of safety for adolescents struggling with the world beneath.

### **A Culture of Focus**

This third workshop served as a behavioral overview for adolescents as the impact and general principles from the first two culture workshops were

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8. The part of the brain that moderates emotional responses.

9. 1 Peter 1:16; Leviticus 11:44–45.

considered. In the beginning, parents/adults were asked to describe younger generations on a scale of 1 to 10, where one was more selfish/self-serving, and ten was being more charitable/selfless. After some hesitancy, the discussion shifted to how it was not exactly fair to make blanket statements that would summarize a whole generation of people, recognizing there are often more exceptions to the status-quo than may be realized. This fit in nicely with the general direction of the rest of the workshop as it covered the general trends and lifestyle choices younger generations make. Author Jeffrey Arnett proposes four significant forces in the mid-20th century in his book, *Emerging Adulthood*:<sup>10</sup> the technology revolution,<sup>11</sup> the sexual revolution,<sup>12</sup> the women's movement,<sup>13</sup> and the youth movement.<sup>14</sup> The question in a Culture of Focus is where the attention of adolescents and young adults lies. Based on specific patterns and cultural developments, it is not inaccurate to describe them as self-focused. However, this does not mean that they are selfish. It simply means that they are attempting to sort out their identity in the context of a constantly shifting culture.

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10. Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*.

11. The economy moved from "manufacturing" to "service" employment, increasing the need for post-secondary education.

12. This movement began in the 1960s with access to "the pill," allowing people more control over when they become pregnant.

13. More possibilities for women in the workforce resulted in less pressure for them to marry or have children earlier in life. This also opened society to the possibility of dual income households.

14. The youth movement changed what it meant to become an adult. Marriage, home, and children can wait past the age of 30—a person's life in their 20s is a time to explore the world and form their identity.

In a Culture of Focus, the gospel tie-in is found in the instructions to take care of the needs of others around us.<sup>15</sup> Adolescents ought to be praised and encouraged to continue to be sensitive to the needs of people around them! The Apostle Paul instructs the church to utilize the various gifts given to them by the Holy Spirit to build up the body of Christ.<sup>16</sup> Younger generations should also find solace in the fact that God remains the same yesterday, today, and forever.<sup>17</sup> The instructions to parents/adults are to allow younger generations to sort out their identity while providing them room to explore new possibilities and to learn from failure. They were also given potential sources to help them stay informed about cultural trends and shifts from the perspective of a biblical worldview, including the websites for the Axis Culture Translator and the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding. The challenge extends beyond individual families into the realm of the local congregation: how might the local church structure its ministries in a way that utilizes cultural trends while still remaining faithful to Scripture? There is likely no single answer for every church. This question is meant to start a discussion that every church ought to continue having in order to better minister to younger generations.

### **A Culture of Religion**

After a brief overview of the previous workshops, the discussion began with adults determining what the end goal was for desiring younger generations

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15. 1 John 3:17–18; Proverbs 21:13.

16. 1 Corinthians 12.

17. Hebrews 13:8.

and families to come to church. This discussion helped clear the air of any sentiment regarding improper or unhealthy attitudes for why regular attendance at worship services is important. Information was provided regarding the stark difference between “spirituality” and “religion.” Based on helpful research from Anthony James,<sup>18</sup> spirituality is essentially a more culturally friendly version of religion. The Pew Research Center and the Barna Group also provided helpful research regarding younger generations and their stance on religion/religious practices. The study that sparked the most interest and discussion during the workshop was regarding reasons why Christians and non-Christians alike feel like they do not need to go to church.<sup>19</sup> Responses included a lack of relevance, being able to find God in other places, being able to teach themselves about their faith from available resources, not liking the people in the church, believing the church was out of date, and finding the rituals of the church empty. This opened a fairly lengthy discussion on how the reasons provided by the Barna study are seen in the immediate community surrounding the DFLP.

The gospel tie-in to this topic is that parents ought to take on their God-given role as the primary teacher of the faith to their children.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, while there are many religious and spiritual systems available to people today, the exclusive truth of Christianity is seen in Jesus’ statements concerning Himself in

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18. Walt Mueller, “Parents as Spiritual Nurturers,” *Center for Parent Youth Understanding*, <https://cpyu.org/resource/parents-as-spiritual-nurturers-2/>, (December 18, 2018).

19. Barna Group, “Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z,” <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/> (January 24, 2018).

20. Deuteronomy 6:4–9.

the Gospel of John.<sup>21</sup> The importance of mentorship and discipleship is seen in Paul's second letter to Timothy,<sup>22</sup> as well as in his other pastoral epistles. Adults were encouraged in this workshop to be role models in the Christian faith for younger generations. They were also encouraged to continue to stay connected with students after they graduate from high school and enter post-secondary education or the workforce as young adults.

Along with the challenge to continue to pray for revival, adults were invited to seek out ways to partner with or help other parents in the church community. This would allow the church to build a stronger community rather than attempting to fulfill the task of discipleship independently from one another. Finally, to echo one of the main objectives of this research project, they were encouraged to potentially change their definition of what makes a church strong: from an organization looking for success to a community that actively pursues health.

### **A Culture of Sex**

When asked if anyone could recall the last time their church had a serious, healthy discussion about sex, a few recalled hearing their pastor talk about it, but it was in the context of a sermon, not an open discussion. It is possible for members of a church to have conversations like this without getting explicit or uncomfortably personal. Adolescents are receiving input from all sorts of sources

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21. John 14:6; 10:9–16.

22. 2 Timothy 2:2.



on this topic, and it is crucial that at least one of those sources is a local congregation that approaches the topic from a biblical worldview. Leaving the topic simply as “A Culture of Sex” was an issue because of all the potential areas that fall under this category (i.e., masturbation, premarital sex, pornography, teen pregnancy, and gender identity). For the sake of brevity, this particular workshop focused on cohabitation, dating trends, and cultural tensions regarding abstinence education. Speaking to this subject from a biblical standpoint was reasonably straight-forward: Christians recognize that sex is not a bad thing since God created it. The Bible has quite a lot to say about healthy relationships,<sup>23</sup> how to pursue/maintain a strong marriage,<sup>24</sup> and the impact that sin has on this particular area.<sup>25</sup> The Barna Group had some helpful materials on the subject of cohabitation,<sup>26</sup> offering some insights as to why it has become a more culturally acceptable practice in the United States. The affects culture is having on dating/relationships is not difficult to see among adolescents, with data suggesting that they want to make sure to “get their relationship right” as opposed to experiencing a breakup.

Regarding the application for parents/adults to consider, there is a certain amount of value in observing with a critical eye what the media is saying about

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23. Galatians 5; Philippians 2; Proverbs 27.

24. Genesis 1–2; Ephesians 4; Proverbs 5; Matthew 19.

25. Romans 1; 1 Corinthians 6; Colossians 3; Hebrews 13; James 1; Philippians 4.

26. Barna Group, “Majority of Americans Now Believe in Cohabitation,” <https://www.barna.com/research/majority-of-americans-now-believe-in-cohabitation/> (June 24, 2016).

topics relating to sex. Parents were encouraged to have an ongoing discussion with teenagers about this topic, even though there may be social discomfort or awkwardness involved. Christians ought to celebrate reasons why people should wait to be sexually active until after marriage rather than overwhelming young adults and students with evidence that supports a given worldview. Having the congregation keep tabs on what is becoming more culturally acceptable allows for more opportunities to compare and discuss these topics from a biblical worldview. The gospel tie-in to this final workshop does not stop with Christians admitting that sex is a gift from God. Christians also ought to celebrate the benefits and healthy relationships that come when God's instructions are followed. To view sex and relationships in a broader scope, intimacy in marriage is a type of relationship that exists between God and the Church. This is seen in the marriage language in Revelation 21 as well as the intimate language used throughout the book of Song of Solomon. God-honoring sex is not limited to a pleasurable act; it is an act of intimacy and vulnerability between two people who have pledged their whole selves to one another.

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